











REFORM IN  
SUNDAY SCHOOL  
TEACHING

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## PREFACE

THE present book is based on nine articles contributed to *The Primitive Methodist Leader* in the latter part of 1905. In acceding to a desire expressed by many that they should be issued in a more permanent form, I have taken the opportunity not simply to revise but considerably to expand them. Criticisms have been examined and misunderstandings removed by re-statement. Several points have received a fuller development. Special mention may be made of the stress laid on the fact that revelation is a process in history as settling for us the lines on which the study of the Bible may be most successfully pursued. I have also sketched briefly the theology of the leading prophets and of Paul, to help such teachers as are unfamiliar with the subject to see how it may most profitably be taught.

A religious journal has warned its readers against attaching undue importance to my views on Sunday School Reform for the reason that "it is confessedly difficult for theological professors and educationalists to realise the actual conditions and needs, as well as the limitations, of Sunday School work." I am



not, it is true, an educationalist, but I must plead guilty to being a theological professor. Still, I was not born on the planet Mars, nor have I lived all my life in a balloon. I have never even succumbed to the delusion that a professor's eyes should be always in the ends of the earth. On the contrary, for half of my life I was in close contact with the Sunday School, and though the pressure of other duties has not for several years permitted me an active share in this field of service, I have embraced several opportunities of conference with Sunday School teachers. There are many elements in Sunday School Reform which have been deliberately omitted in this book, since I have no special competence to deal with them. But as the greater part of my life has been spent in studying, or teaching, or writing on the Bible, I must modestly but firmly claim my right to express an opinion on the curriculum of the Sunday School. I was myself apprehensive that the lack of practical acquaintance with recent developments, and an almost complete ignorance of what had been written on reform, might betray me here and there into mistaken judgments. Yet the study of the present curriculum in the light of such professional experience as I had gained left me with no misgivings that a false verdict had been reached. And the result has confirmed my confidence. I have been assured by many who have spent a considerable number



of years in Sunday School teaching, to say nothing of ministers, that the defects I had theoretically deduced actually occurred in the practical working of the system, and that the articles had given expression to convictions that experience had forced upon them. This view has been corroborated by others who have had experience in writing expositions of the lessons or conducting teachers' preparation classes. On the other hand, the criticisms passed on the articles have not, I believe, really affected any positions maintained in them. There has been no serious defence of the curriculum, for pious opinions unsupported by definite argument can hardly be described in that way. With much that has been said in praise of an International system I have no quarrel; my criticism is directed against the lines on which the Committee works. As the attack on the system may seem sharp in tone, it must be said explicitly that when the articles were written I could not have named a single member of the Committee, and I know now almost as little of its composition as I knew then. It is futile to blunt the edge of criticism if one feels that the axe must be laid at the root of the tree. I will not do the members of the Committee the injustice of supposing that, when the interests at stake are so grave, they will feel personal resentment at any attack, which, however sharp, has been dictated solely by concern for the interests of the

Kingdom of God, and has throughout been animated by a desire to be scrupulously fair.

My hope is that this book may soon become obsolete through the triumph of the cause for which it pleads. The first step to this end ought to be the appointment of a strong and competent committee to investigate the whole subject in an unfettered way, and with the single aim of devising the best possible curriculum. On that Committee three classes should be represented: experts on education and child-study, Biblical and theological scholars and practical Sunday School workers. Suggestions should be freely invited from all who think they have any helpful contribution to make. Much chaff may be sent in response to this invitation, but when that is winnowed away, many valuable hints will remain. Thus the collective wisdom may be brought to bear on a problem second to none of those that confront the Church in urgency and importance.

I wish to express my thanks to the Rev. Carey Bonner for information he has courteously and at some trouble procured for me. I am also grateful to the writer of the column which deals with the Churches in *The Daily News*, for bringing my articles to the notice of many who would otherwise have remained in ignorance of them.

ARTHUR S. PEAKE.

*March, 1906.*

# CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I.—The Task of the Sunday School . . . . .	9
II.—The International Lessons : Leading Principles	21
III.—The International Lessons : General Scheme .	32
IV.—The International Lessons : Filling in of the Scheme . . . . .	43
V.—Constructive Suggestions for Junior Classes .	62
VI.—Constructive Suggestions for Senior Classes .	91
VII.—The Teacher and the Curriculum . . . . .	117





# REFORM IN SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHING

## CHAPTER I

### THE TASK OF THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

I WRITE this book from an urgent conviction that the intelligent hold of the next generation on Christianity depends largely on the reform of our Sunday School teaching. I am well aware that many resent criticism of our present Sunday School methods, but for that reason it is all the more necessary that those of us who feel their defects should speak out. Much of our secular teaching suffers from similar deficiencies, though probably not of so glaring a character. The test of successful education is that after a boy has been working at a subject for several years he should be able to show some adequate result for it. It is no uncommon experience

for a lad to be learning Greek or Latin for a number of years, and at the end of it to be unable to read a classical author with any pleasure or even comfort; or he learns French for several years, and while he may be able to read to himself with more or less comprehension, he would probably shrink from reading aloud, and would find himself helpless if plunged into conversation with a fluent Frenchman. In other words, he has spent a large percentage of the days allotted to him in these pursuits, and at the end of the time has comparatively little to show for it. We may trust that the intellectual discipline has not been altogether thrown away, but the fact remains that years of study have not resulted in mastery of the subject. It is clear that where this is the case there is something wrong with the methods of education. We are bound to bring the teaching of our young people to the same practical test. After all the years spent in the Sunday School, to say nothing of the numerous sermons they have been forced to hear, *what have they to show for it?*

Let us ask ourselves the question, "What *ought* to be the outcome of these years of

teaching ? ” I put in the first place a clear and definite apprehension of what Christianity means. I am not, of course, pleading for such a training as is given to the ministry, but I do plead for something that shall be systematic and precise. It is undesirable that the fundamental tenets of religion should be learnt at haphazard, out of connection with each other, and in a very crude and undigested form. I much admire the Anglican insistence on the need for definite teaching, even where I dissent from much of the definite teaching given. We should consider it the primary duty incumbent upon us to instruct our children in Christianity as we understand it. Let us see that they are able to give an intelligent account of the leading principles of the Gospel, instead of a bald caricature, marked alike by inaccuracy and disproportion. Then, in the next place, they should not only be able to explain what Christianity is, but have a reason for the faith that is in them. Here, again, I am not claiming that we should give them elaborate courses in Apologetics, but that they should not be allowed to go out into the world completely unarmed against the scepticism which they are bound to encounter.

Let them see that their religion can be defended on grounds of reason, and is not merely to be based on authority or the prescription conferred by long possession. These two things I regard as primary on the intellectual side. It is understood that there is one thing more important than either ; the main end to aim at is, not that they should understand Christianity or be able to defend it, but that it should become their own living possession. But this will itself be greatly helped by the other two, for if a man fails to understand the Gospel he cannot enter into the fulness of its enjoyment, and if he does not know how to defend it, there is a peril that it may be wrested from him. I repeat, then, that the main function of the Sunday School as a teaching institution should be to send out its children fully equipped with a due comprehension of Christian truth, and an intelligent grasp of the grounds on which it may be reasonably held.

The third function of the Sunday School is to impart instruction in the Bible. This is the great classic of religion, the main source of our knowledge of God, and the perennial spring from which our religious life is fed. The Bible must always, indeed, continue to be the main



text-book in the Sunday School. Even for his primary duty of imparting sound and systematic religious instruction it is to the Scriptures that the teacher must chiefly resort for his matter. The more he secures familiarity with the Bible, the richer will be the store of raw material to be worked up into an ordered presentation of Christian truth. The Bible is no manual of Systematic Theology, it is something very much better than that. But Systematic Theology has its rightful place. For we are driven on, by an instinct that will not let us go, to sort and classify the facts and ideas that come to us from Scripture into a coherent scheme of God and the Universe. It is one of the great gains which our modern study has brought us, that we regard Scripture rather as the great source from which Theology should be drawn than the mere guarantee of a system constructed largely in independence of it. It is in accordance with the scientific temper of our age that we return to the origins and test the validity of later constructions by their harmony with them. Alike, then, for its own sake and for the intelligent grasp of Christianity the Bible must always hold the first place in the Sunday School.

But the Bible is a vast literature, and at best only a beginning can be made. What are the essential things that ought not to be neglected? I place first certain lines of general study. We do not expect to turn out juvenile experts in Biblical criticism; but it ought not to be difficult to give our young people some conception of the way in which the wonderful literature that we call the Bible has come into existence; it may be little more than a bare outline, it need not be too critical, but assured results ought not to be ignored. An appeal of this kind is apt to be curtly dismissed by a scornful reference to the latest novelties from Germany or the mutual contradictions of the critics. This is so wide of the mark that one may pardonably express amazement at its irrelevance. It is not the latest novelties, but well-tested conclusions which have been accepted by the vast majority of scholars, that ought to be set before our young people. We pay too high a price for traditional views when we make our children bankrupt in faith. What right have we to pledge the credit of the Gospel to secure the solvency of tradition? That critics disagree is no cause for wonder. Do philosophers or

theologians, historians or economists dwell together in unity? On the main lines of Old Testament criticism scholars are largely agreed, and it is for the results on which this practical unanimity has been secured that a place should be found in Sunday School teaching. In how many instances this would have saved the disastrous shock when discovery of the facts has involved the shipwreck of faith! Yet I do not care to make this a prominent feature. The teacher should impart the information without fuss or parade, not as though he was enunciating something novel or startling, but in the calm tone in which his brother in the Day School expounds the once dangerous heresy of the earth's motion round the sun. It is unhealthy for teachers and taught to be posing as naughty heretics, when as a matter of fact they are repeating the merest commonplaces of Biblical Introduction. And while I think Biblical criticism is important, I am concerned that we should not overrate its importance or put our emphasis in the wrong place. In itself it is not more fascinating as an intellectual exercise than the criticism of the Homeric poems. Its value for us lies in its arrangement of the documents in

their chronological order, and in the clear insight we thus gain into the development of the religion of Israel and of primitive Christianity. Since revelation is a process in history, we cannot apprehend the revelation aright apart from a knowledge of the history through which it came. And this involves a critical study of the documents. I do not think it is wise to deal elaborately with these subjects in the Sunday School, except in an Advanced Class. But an outline of results might be taught at a comparatively early period. The value of such an outline is that it gives certain fixed points which will be most useful in helping the student to grasp the course of development in more important respects. It would answer much the same purpose as learning a list of the kings and queens of England, with their dates, serves for the student of English history. It is important to know these dates for their own sakes, but even more important since they provide a skeleton, which may be clothed with the flesh and blood of historical narrative. And the same thing applies to the main results of Biblical scholarship. Similarly the children should have an outline of the leading events in Hebrew history arranged in chrono-



logical order and dated. One of the writers who contributed to the discussion on my articles has the following significant paragraph in his letter:—"As a result of the want of method and arrangement I have found in asking questions of the scholars from the desk that they have very vague ideas as to the times in which various Bible characters lived—whether Isaiah was before or after Peter, and whether it really did happen that David played the harp in the house of Paul, and whether Saul (of Tarsus) reigned before or after Christ. The fact is the whole thing is a confused jumble in their minds, and of course fails to obtain the interest which would follow a common-sense method of instruction." I imagine that this writer's experience does not stand alone. So deplorable a state of things would be largely prevented if care were taken to drill the children in the elements of Biblical chronology.

Far more vital than an acquaintance with the development of the literature and the chronological order of events is it to know the history of the religion. It seems to me a matter of great moment that our young people should be familiar, in its main outlines, with the growth

of the religion of Israel, and it is still more necessary that they should understand the various types of teaching in the New Testament. The study of selected short passages might be carried on side by side with these wider studies ; but of the two I am clear in my own mind that the wider and more general study is the more important. To see things in their true proportions they must have a view of things as a whole. A bird's-eye view it may be, but still that will give them a feeling for the lie of the country such as no study of details is able to impart, and it will, moreover, help to secure that the details, when they are studied, shall be fitted into their proper place. A sense of the Bible as a whole ought to be given to our children, and I rank that as second only to the importance of the understanding of Christianity and a knowledge of the lines on which its defence should be conducted. But there is one thing more which I feel sure that we should aim at in the religious teaching of our young people. We ought so to teach the Bible as to create an enthusiasm for it. Here much may be done by fostering a feeling for it as literature. We are agreed that great literature has an elevating

and inspiring effect on the mind, simply in virtue of the fact that it is great literature. It is good for us to read Homer and Shakespeare quite apart from any message that they may be held to convey to us. And the same thing is true of the Bible. Viewed simply as literature, it must always rank as one of the world's great classics, and many may be won to love it through a feeling for its literary qualities who would not be attracted by its religious and moral teaching. It is a great thing to get them to love the Bible for any reason; if they begin with appreciation of it as literature, we may trust that by-and-by they will be aroused to a sense of its value for religion. To make it distasteful to them is the worst service that the Sunday School can render. The literary sense is, no doubt, unequally distributed, just as the religious sense is. Many of our children may be almost entirely without it. Others, however, really possess it as a native instinct, and when that is the case we ought to capture them for the Bible through it.

But when we come to the actual condition of things, I imagine that no argument is needed to prove that it differs widely from the course

that I have sketched. It differs so widely, in fact, that one must suppose the ideals which underlie the present system to be quite other than the ideals for which I wish to plead. But the very divergence forces me to the unwelcome task of criticism. I hope it will be clearly understood that in all I say I am concerned for the future of religious education in our churches, and that I trust I am not insensible to the great claims that Sunday School teachers have on our gratitude. I am filled with the warmest admiration as I think of the sacrifice involved on the part of many who give up a large portion of their scanty leisure to service in the Sunday School. And I readily grant, further, that the present condition of things is, in all probability, a great improvement on what went before it. Radically unsatisfactory and educationally unsound as I believe it to be, it is vastly preferable to the state of things which prevailed when every teacher did that which was right in his own eyes,



## CHAPTER II

### THE INTERNATIONAL LESSONS : LEADING PRINCIPLES

THE advantages of an International system of lessons may be easily overrated, but I willingly admit that they are very considerable. The fact that a writer can count on so large an audience of interested Sunday School teachers has induced many able men both in this country and in America to contribute expositions of the lessons to the various periodicals devoted to Sunday School work. It is a great thing for Sunday School teachers that a prince among expositors like Dr. Maclaren or a Biblical scholar so eminent as Dr. Adeney should expound a lesson for their benefit ; and at a small expense a teacher can provide himself week by week with a large number of expositions of the lesson by able men of different types and writing from different points of view. The International system has these and other obvious advantages,\* and I should be

\* I have been criticised for failing to state the real character and achievements of the International Lesson system on

sorry if I had to suggest a reform which should deprive us of them. As I seem to have been misunderstood on this point I may say explicitly that I am in favour of an International system if the authorities responsible for its control are

their favourable side. The fact is that I state neither defects nor merits of an International system in any detail. My criticism is not aimed at the International idea in itself, but at the scheme of Lessons prepared by the International Committee. My friend, the Rev. S. S. Henshaw, the Secretary of the Primitive Methodist Sunday School Union, has taken me to task on this matter, and, as I wish to give the Committee full credit for all that it has accomplished, I quote his eulogy:—"Professor Peake does not by any means give his readers a clear, adequate conception of what the International Lesson system really is and of what it has done. He has criticised its weaknesses, emphasized its defects, exposed its shortcomings, proclaimed its sins of omission and commission, and no one can say that he has not done his work thoroughly. But there is surely another side. The system has its excellences, its achievements. It has rendered invaluable service to the cause of intelligent systematic teaching. It has introduced order and efficiency where confusion and feebleness prevailed. It has revolutionised Sunday School methods. It gives a fairly comprehensive survey of the essential histories of the Old and New Testaments. It especially lifts into prominence the life of Jesus, the facts of the Gospel. It links the Sunday Schools of the world together in the holy fellowship of a common study of the Word of God ; and anything that binds the young peoples of different lands together in common Christian exercises does more than that. By doing that, it makes for International peace and brotherhood. It has called forth an abundant supply of excellent helps on the lessons, maps, pictures, expositions. The teacher has at hand for a small outlay the best thoughts of the ablest minds. It has called into existence auxiliary institutions that fasten the habit of Bible study among the young. The International Bible Reading Association has nearly a million members, and of these one hundred thousand are Primitive Methodists, belonging to our own Bible and Prayer Union. 'Snippets,' the daily readings may be called. Well, yes. But if you can get young people to read ten verses of Scripture only per day in a year, they total up to something very much

willing to adopt a sound scheme of instruction. If not, then I should not wish for an independent organisation to be started, unless the Sunday School Union in England also proved unwilling. If both Committees turned a deaf ear to suggestions of radical reform, it would then become our duty to seek some other solution, either by appealing to the Free Church Federation, as my friend and colleague, Professor Currie Martin has suggested, or by creating an independent organisation. I sincerely trust it will not be necessary to face either of the latter alternatives. The machinery might remain, but the method should be superseded by something better and more adequate. At the same time the system itself has its perils. With so large a constituency movement may readily become too slow, the pace of progress being set by the laggards with whom the more forward spirits have to keep

more than a 'snippet.' These readings, it should be remarked, are connected with the International Lesson and are intended to illumine it. Further, the International Lesson system has prepared the way for any further steps that a progressive Sunday School policy may demand. And it is gratefully regarded and used by the best Sunday School workers in the world."—*Primitive Methodist Leader*, December 7, 1905. In the main I have no quarrel with this. But it is really irrelevant to my criticism. Nearly all of the advantages he claims for the system would remain if my suggestions were adopted.

step. We must also bear in mind that where a religious institution is associated with the publishing business on so large a scale, the danger that the spiritual may be sacrificed to the commercial is one that is only too likely to make itself felt.

I pass on then to my examination of the methods adopted by the Committee. My first criticism is directed against an evil heritage it has adopted from the older type of teaching. This is the idea that it is necessary each time a Sunday School class meets for a definite section of Scripture to form the basis of the lesson. This seems to be the almost universal practice. The International system rests on the same principle, with a review of lessons at the end of the quarter. The same applies to the Morning Lessons prepared by the British Sunday School Union. I regard the whole idea and practice as a mere fetish. I do not, of course, mean, as I have been misunderstood to mean, that Biblical teaching is a Sunday School fetish. I need only refer to what I have already said as to the need for making the Bible the main text-book in our schools. But what I do mean and wish emphatically to reaffirm is that the present practice of



invariably basing the lesson on a brief section of Scripture is a fetish that must be discarded if progress is to be made. Selected portions of Scripture should often be read in class, and much Biblical teaching of a general kind ought to be given, in connection with which such portions may be read. But the present method involves a most unwise use of time. In the first place, it leaves time for nothing else, which in itself is a defect grave enough to condemn it out of hand. When we have in view how much systematic instruction in Christian doctrine and evidences and in general Biblical knowledge is indispensable to a satisfactory religious education, the inference seems to be irresistible that lessons based on selected portions of Scripture should be very greatly reduced. In the second place, the Bible is so large a book that supposing a boy to be taking the International and other lessons for four years, he will, even if he gets nearly eight hundred lessons in the time, be nevertheless compelled to leave large parts of the Bible unread and therefore practically unknown even in the most general way. In other words, the very method which bends all its energies to Bible teaching, and a restricted

type of Bible teaching at that, can accomplish this task only most imperfectly, while it leaves tasks even more urgent altogether untouched.

Now, in view of this difficulty, two courses are open. It is obvious that a selection has to be made, and it may be made either on the principle of choosing certain books or connected portions of Scripture for special study, neglecting all the rest, or an attempt may be made to select with some impartiality over the whole field. Both methods are unsatisfactory, but of the two, from an educational point of view, the former seems to me obviously preferable. But it is not the method adopted by those who arrange the International Lessons. They seem to work on the other principle. It is obvious that the knowledge gained on their system can only be fragmentary. If the Bible is studied in snippets, it is only snippety knowledge that can be acquired; whereas, if it is studied in blocks, at least some comprehensive and systematic knowledge of these may be secured. The Bible lends itself better to the latter kind of treatment than to the former, and if care were taken that the books selected should be studied in a given order, a really useful knowledge might in that

way be gained. But when the scholars are dragged up and down at the committee's caprice, it is too much to expect that they will have anything but an incoherent knowledge of the revelation given to Israel, with its culmination in the Gospel. Moreover, the whole system of lessons based on selections has this unfortunate effect, the temptation is to look out for twelve or sixteen verse sections to which some edifying moral can be tacked. Now, it goes without saying that this principle discriminates heavily against the inclusion of portions of Scripture which it is highly desirable that children should be taught. The moral of Scripture is by no means always on so limited a scale, it may grow with great impressiveness and cumulative power out of a whole series of chapters, not one section of which, taken by itself, might provide any specially appropriate moral at all. Besides, there is much preliminary matter that every student of the Bible ought to know if he is to get the most out of the sections of Scripture that he studies, and this also does not lend itself to the inculcation of a moral. It ought, however, to form part of the Sunday School curriculum.

Another point that is of great importance is

this—it is a serious mistake to spread the same lesson over the whole school. It is quite true that the same lesson may be treated in a more elementary or a more advanced form, but the same lesson is not equally suited to different ages in a large number of instances, whereas it may be pre-eminently suited for one stage. It is not here, however, that the chief objection lies. I am contemplating a systematic course of instruction that goes forward in a straight line, where there is not only progress in the treatment, but progress also in the subject treated. The junior classes should be occupied with more elementary subjects, the senior classes with more advanced. The present system is rather a closed circle ; wherever a boy joins it he has the whole school with him, and round the circle the whole school tramps together. The subject always remains throughout his school course, roughly speaking, at the same level, the only difference being that as he moves from class to class the treatment becomes presumably more advanced. In any other subject but religion, everyone would see at once the grotesqueness of the method, so true is it that the children of this world are wiser than the children of light.



If we muddled the affairs of this world as we persist in muddling the affairs of the next, financial ruin would be a much more normal experience than it is. I can see no gain, from the fact that the whole school studies the same lesson, to outweigh the disadvantages I have indicated.

It would, of course, mean that the summing up by the superintendent, and his address on the lesson to the whole school would have to be abandoned, but whatever value this may possess, it can hardly be seriously contended that the present system should be retained simply that this feature may not be surrendered. But would it not involve a large dislocation in the supply of helps? When there is a single lesson taken throughout the school, one exposition may be made to serve for all classes. Are we to have four or five different sets of lessons provided for four or five different grades of children? Even the present system, however, necessitates some difference in methods of treatment for senior and junior classes. Such religious weeklies as give Sunday School lessons naturally supply one exposition, which does duty for all classes. But the magazines or papers specially devoted

to Sunday School work do vary their treatment, so that to some extent the duplication or triplication of lessons obtains under present conditions. Moreover, the Committee itself has recently struck its flag to those who have urged differential treatment for the junior and the advanced classes, and whatever be our view of the scheme adopted for the junior section, the recognition that there should be some adaptation of lesson to age is a most welcome sign of progress. We are, therefore, already past the point at which the objection I am rebutting can properly be taken. It is clear, however, that the proper medium for lessons, such as I suggest, would be books rather than newspapers or magazines. Nor need this mean the elimination of the latter. Papers and magazines for the help of Sunday School teachers might still be continued, only adjusted to saner educational conditions. They should embrace discussions by the most competent writers of the many problems connected with the Sunday School, such as methods of education, the maintenance of discipline, the relations of the Sunday School to other departments of the Church, child study, and the training of teachers. They could give their readers the gist of the best

books bearing on education, and especially on Sunday School work, or on the subject-matter of teaching, above all on the Bible. They could keep them in touch with suggestions made for the improvement of the schools, whether in this country or America, and with any important movements of which it is desirable that teachers should be informed. They might still supply expositions of selected portions of Scripture and illustrative material, they might give due prominence to articles on Biblical and religious knowledge, on Theology and Apologetics. All of these would fill their columns with something much better than the exposition of lessons that at present have to go in of necessity, since the contributors would write under less artificial and more congenial conditions.

## CHAPTER III

### THE INTERNATIONAL LESSONS: GENERAL SCHEME

It is not enough, however, to bring general objections to the International system. Let us look at it more closely. I have before me the lesson lists from 1900-1905, and in addition a general statement as to the subjects from 1906-1911. The plan adopted works out as follows. In 1900 and the former part of 1901, the general subject was "The Life of Jesus," and the lessons were chosen not only from the Synoptists but also from John, and at the end a few lessons were given on "The Glorified Life of Christ." Then for the second half of 1901 selections from Genesis and Exodus were given, ending with the passage of the Red Sea. After the six months thus spent in the early part of the Old Testament, for the first six months of 1902 we deal with the early church, reaching Paul's crossing to Europe. Then for the last six months we are switched back to Israel in the wilderness, and follow the history down to the call of Samuel. The sequel has to be deferred for another six months, since, with the beginning of 1903 we



are permitted to learn what Paul did when he crossed into Europe, if the six months' interval has not made us forget all the story. We are then enabled to pursue his career down to his last charge to Timothy, which luckily coincides with the end of the second quarter. Then for the last six months of the year we take up the thread of the History of Israel where we dropped it six months before. 1904 finds us back on New Testament ground, and we have six months devoted to the Life of Jesus. Here, however, except for the Easter and Whitsuntide lessons, we are left to the Synoptists. The Committee seems to have learnt that an amalgam of the Synoptists and John does not work satisfactorily, and has accordingly confined itself to the Synoptic presentation of Christ's life. With the third quarter we return to the History of Israel, which is mainly based on Kings, but has some sections from Chronicles that might well have given place to some more selections from contemporary prophecy. The history is carried down to the captivity of the ten tribes. Then, with 1905, the first six months are spent on the Fourth Gospel, with two lessons from the Revelation at the end, while the last six

months are devoted to the Old Testament. Here, unfortunately, the committee has followed II Chronicles instead of Kings for the rest of the history down to the Fall of Jerusalem, but certain sections are inserted from the prophets. From the Book of Isaiah we have Hezekiah's prayer, the fourth Servant poem, and the 55th chapter. From Jeremiah we have the account of Jehoiakim's burning of the roll and of Jeremiah in the dungeon. Then there are a dozen verses from Ezekiel on the life-giving stream, followed by three lessons from Daniel. The rest of the year is occupied with the return and subsequent history, mainly from Ezra and Nehemiah, but with a lesson from Zechariah and another from Malachi.

The next seven years are mapped out as follows :—1906, The Synoptic Gospels ; 1907, The Patriarchs and Samuel ; 1908, January to June, Gospel of St. John ; July to December, Saul to Solomon ; 1909, Acts and Epistles ; 1910, Kings and Prophets of Judah and Israel ; 1911, St. Matthew. Such is the general scheme. It is obvious that the aim has been to carry the children over a large area of the history. I say advisedly of the history, for whole tracts of the Bible are left completely untouched. That the

Law receives very slight attention is comparatively unimportant, but the Prophets and the Poetical Books have been left entirely aside, with only trifling exceptions, and I fear that the subject for 1910 is intended to embrace no more than we have had previously. It may, of course, be urged that these parts of Scripture are unsuited for the junior classes. I agree in the main, but this is simply a fundamental weakness in the whole system, that the senior classes have to be limited in their choice of subject to history, because history is most suitable for the junior classes. But what this means can be clear only from a somewhat more detailed statement. A temperance or a Christmas lesson is occasionally chosen from Proverbs or Isaiah ; but apart from this, the prophets come in simply as bits of history, often at very inappropriate places. It is almost incredible that between the translation of Elijah and the succession of Elisha, a lesson should be wedged in from Amos nearly a century too soon, which dealt with an entirely different set of political and social conditions, and so far as it is calculated to do anything would altogether mislead the children as to the significance of Amos.

Then Isaiah immediately follows Joash's repair of the temple, fourteen verses being chosen out of the first chapter. If only one passage could be chosen from the writings of this prophet, it should obviously have been the sixth chapter, containing the account of the vision in which he received his call. There, as in a nutshell, almost the whole of his message is embodied. He who understands Isaiah's vision is at the right point of view for understanding the whole of his work and estimating his significance. In the reign of Hezekiah we have two sections from the Second Isaiah (Isa. xl.—lv.), which belongs to the captivity. One of these, the fourth Servant poem (Isa. lii. 13—liii. 12), is explicable only in the light of the captivity. It is most inappropriate in the reign of Hezekiah, and in its isolated position in the scheme of lessons is disconnected from all the context which fixes its interpretation. But the other passage, which may vie with it in its claim to be the most important passage in the Old Testament—I mean Jeremiah's prophecy of the New Covenant—is omitted altogether. We have instead two interesting and impressive narratives from the life of Jeremiah, selected, no doubt, for their

appropriate morals, but nothing that can give any idea of what constituted him the greatest among the prophets of Israel. Why Jonah is omitted I cannot in the least understand. I should have expected a dozen verses to be picked out from somewhere in the book. That is how the Book of Ruth was treated; a fragment of seven verses was torn out of it, and in this barely intelligible form made the subject of a lesson, no other part of it being selected for a lesson.

Now, let us remember that the prophetic movement in Israel was one of the mightiest movements in the world's history, and one that has vitally and profoundly affected that history. Let us remember further that the religion of Israel and its great significance for the spiritual education of the race cannot be understood apart from a comprehension of the prophets. How much is it possible for our Sunday School scholars to know of the prophets from the lessons chosen for them by the Committee?

What has been said of the prophets is true also of the poetical and wisdom literature. Taking the years from 1900-1905 we get the following results. No lessons at all are selected from Job, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, or the Song of Songs.



The omission of the last three probably matters little, and I readily grant that Job does not lend itself to the kind of treatment favoured by the Committee, though it is surely a pity that so wonderful a piece of literature and one with so immediate a bearing on our present difficulties should remain entirely excluded. Proverbs is drawn upon in two years for a temperance lesson, but otherwise is left alone. This neglect is somewhat surprising in the training of young people. Still more inexplicable is the treatment of the Psalms. Here one would have thought that the method of selection was less baneful than in the majority of cases, inasmuch as there are numerous Psalms of about the right length, according to the Committee's standard, which lend themselves readily to separate treatment, since they are complete in themselves and, therefore, have not to be torn out of their context. In the whole of the six years, however, I find lessons from the Psalms only in the fourth quarter of 1903. Three lessons are chosen, but chosen merely as illustrating incidents in the life of David ; with what critical justification I do not now stay to inquire. One may at least be thankful to get Psalms xxiii. and li. in on any

pretext. Psalm xxxii., however, might well have given place to a large number of others more important in every way. But what are we to think of a system which can make no more of the Psalms than select three of them, and select these as a mere appendix to the history of David ? I do not see how this can be defended even on the Committee's own principles. The Psalms that should have been included are so numerous, speaking simply from its own point of view, that on this ground alone I refrain from giving an enumeration of those that ought to have been chosen in a list of that kind.

And when we come to the New Testament we find the same state of things. The Epistles are almost entirely excluded. They may come in for a temperance, Easter, or Whitsuntide lesson ; apart from that they are simply introduced in connection with the Acts of the Apostles. For example, in the first two quarters of 1903 we have the story of the Acts from the experiences of Paul and Silas at Philippi. This particular incident is followed by an extract from the Epistle to the Philippians, one of Paul's latest Epistles. Then we are brought to Thessalonica and Berea, and this lesson is followed by an

extract from I Thessalonians, which is one of Paul's earliest Epistles. Thus, the chronological order of the Epistles is sacrificed to the order in which the respective churches were founded. Two lessons are given from I Corinthians to follow the narrative of the foundation of the church at Corinth. The riot at Ephesus is followed by Ephesians ii. 1-10, which is described as Paul's message to the Ephesians, though scholars are almost unanimous that the Epistle was not sent to Ephesus, at any rate exclusively, but to a whole circle of churches. The chronological order of the letters is again deserted in order to secure an extract from Romans, though strangely enough the passage chosen is xiv. 7-14. Romans viii. 1-14, which comes in a little later, seemed to be a suitable Whitsuntide lesson, and one is glad to get it in on those terms; but of all the great doctrinal discussions of Romans, apart from these fourteen verses, there is not a word. This set of lessons closes with an extract from II Timothy, not badly chosen on the whole. How much, one may well ask, do the pupils learn of the real Paul, of his significance for the history of the world and for Christian theology from these meagre scraps? I reconcile

myself without distress to the almost complete omission of the Pastoral Epistles ; and few have better reason to know how extraordinarily difficult the Epistle to the Colossians is. But what are we to make of the complete exclusion of a document of such first-rate importance for the history of Primitive Christianity and so mighty an expression of the Pauline Gospel as the Epistle to the Galatians ? And if we want to understand the man himself, we get to the heart of him nowhere quite as we do in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, which also is passed over altogether. Once again even on the Committee's own principles I cannot understand why some of the autobiographical matter in Galatians, or the catalogue of labours and sufferings in Second Corinthians, should be omitted. No number of lessons from the Acts can possibly give the same intimate and vivid impression of Paul as we get from these passages in his own Epistles. Acts is invaluable as giving us the historical setting, but it carries us a very little way towards understanding the man in all his marvellously complex character. From the seven Catholic Epistles there is only one lesson selected in the course of six years, namely,

I Peter iv. 1-10, on abstinence from evil. Similarly only one lesson is taken from the Epistle to the Hebrews, on Jesus our High Priest in Heaven, and this is tacked on to the end of the Gospel story. Why such a magnificent chapter as the eleventh of Hebrews should have been omitted it passes my wits to discern. The appearance of Jesus to John, in Revelation i. 9-20, comes as a tag to the Gospel history; and that particular series of lessons is concluded by a selection from the twenty-first chapter. That was in 1901; the former of these lessons reappeared in 1905, and the series is similarly concluded with a lesson from the twenty-second chapter under a somewhat dubious title. Here again one would have expected that the letters to the Seven Churches in Asia might have been selected.

The gist of my present criticism is not that the method itself is false, on that I have sufficiently expressed my opinion in the previous chapter, but that even if the method were right, the execution is vicious, the omissions are glaring and inexcusable, and the habit of dropping a subject when it is half through, whether there is a natural break or not, to resume it again six months later, is educationally disastrous.



## CHAPTER IV.

### THE INTERNATIONAL LESSONS : FILLING IN OF THE SCHEME

So far I have dealt only with the general plan ; it remains to be seen if the Committee manages to do better when it comes to the detailed filling in. Unfortunately I have been forced here to an equally unfavourable opinion. It would take several chapters fully to exhibit the choice of lessons in its truly amazing character. Till I came to scrutinise it somewhat closely I had no conception that it was what it actually proves to be.

I will begin with a rather favourable specimen which occupied the first half of 1905, and will therefore be fresh in the minds of many of my readers. The subject is the Gospel of John. I recognise as a praiseworthy feature that the Gospel is treated by itself and that the unhappy attempt to dovetail it with the Synoptists has been abandoned. The series opens well ; no

omissions are made till we come to the end of the fourth lesson. Even the theological depth of the prologue has not tempted the Committee to cut it out, though, to do it justice, more than a single lesson was surely required. This lesson, however, is one that drives home very forcibly the need for discrimination between the older and younger scholars. The first omission is the narrative of the cleansing of the temple. The omissions in the third chapter are easily intelligible, and it would perhaps be hypercritical to lay stress on them. But then, see how the narrative of Jesus at the well is treated; ten verses are selected, with the consequence that the story breaks off abruptly, and one of the great sayings of the Gospel, that on the spirituality of God and the emancipation of religion from local limitations, is completely omitted. So, too, the whole sequel of the narrative, with all the important conversation between Jesus and His disciples, and the belief of the Samaritans because they had heard Jesus for themselves, is left out. The narrative of the miracle at the pool similarly breaks off abruptly; it should have continued at least to the end of the eighteenth verse. The subsequent address of Jesus to the Jews does

not lend itself very well to Sunday School treatment, perhaps, and one may excuse on similar grounds the omissions in chapters seven and eight. Then we come, in chapter six, to the miracle of the loaves and fishes. This again stops at the wrong point; at least the consequence of the miracle, the attempt to make Jesus king, ought to have been included on account of its great importance for the historical situation. The narrative of the walking on the sea is omitted; but more important is the omission of the discourse on the Bread of Life, with the consequent defection of so many of Christ's followers, which on the other hand elicits Peter's great confession. The pupil thus loses one of the most important points in the Johannine development, for the whole narrative in the sixth chapter forms a kind of watershed in this Gospel. The fragments of controversy that are given from the seventh and eighth chapters are torn out of their connection. Then we come to the incident of the man born blind, which fills the ninth chapter. Here again not a third of the story is given, the whole controversy with the Pharisees as to the significance of the event and its culmination in the punish-

ment of the man being left out. Similarly, more than half of the tenth chapter is set aside ; but this is trifling compared with the treatment accorded to the Raising of Lazarus. The whole narrative occupies fifty-three verses, the Committee snips fourteen out of the latter part of it. It is bad enough to lose the first thirty verses of the narrative, but from the point of view of the historian it is even worse that the last part should be left out. The Raising of Lazarus is presented to us by the Evangelist as the event which brings matters to a crisis between Jesus and the authorities, and therefore, if any sense of the movement of the history is to be given, it is imperative that xi. 47-53 should have received a prominent place. The incident of the anointing is given, but the triumphal entry is omitted, perhaps because it comes in the lessons from the Synoptists. But, unfortunately, the highly important visit of the Greeks has to be struck out, and the summary of the whole growth of unbelief which John places with it. We have the narrative of the foot-washing ; but out of all the rest of the story of the Upper Room we have simply the allegory of the vine and the branches and the last twelve verses

of the high-priestly prayer. The fourteenth and sixteenth chapters are omitted altogether. The account of the betrayal and the taking of Jesus, the denial of Peter, and the trial before the High Priest are left out, so that the pupil passes from the close of the high-priestly prayer to the trial by Pilate. But even this cannot be given complete ; sixteen extremely important verses are hacked out of the middle of it, and the narrative comes down simply to the death of Christ in xix. 30. The account of the piercing of Christ's side and the burial by Joseph of Arimathæa and Nicodemus, the running of Peter and the other disciple to the tomb, are all passed by, and we get from the Resurrection history simply the interview between Mary Magdalene and Jesus, and the manifestation of Jesus to the ten disciples. The story of Thomas is left out, and the whole of the twenty-first chapter. Now, these omissions in the Gospel are of varied importance. Where it is a question simply of this or that story which has comparatively little significance for the development of the history, one may reconcile oneself to it ; but what one has to complain of is that frequently the things which were vital to the Evangelist



himself have been cut out, and the progress of the history on which he himself laid great stress, and which he took great pains to exhibit, is badly mutilated. And this is a favourable specimen.

But suppose we take the treatment of Genesis. We open with the creation story, which is carried down to the end of the third verse of the second chapter. From that we jump to the story of the serpent in the Garden of Eden, without any indication of the antecedents of the narrative, the creation of the man and his wife, the planting of the garden, and the prohibition to eat of the tree. The story ends with the punishment of the serpent; then we make a tremendous bound forward, and having one Sunday left the man and his wife waiting to hear their doom, we find ourselves on the next Sunday with Noah in the Ark as the waters are about to abate, without the slightest indication who he was, how he got there, why the deluge is sent, or any of the intervening events. From the sacrifice of Noah at the end of the eighth chapter we make another leap to the call of Abram in the twelfth. The next that we hear is that Abram comes out of Egypt; but how he

came to be in Egypt we have not learnt. A lesson follows on God's promise to Abram in the fifteenth chapter, and the next Sunday we find that our subject is Abraham's intercession for Sodom. The pupil learns that if ten righteous are found in Sodom the city will not be destroyed; but as to whether it is actually destroyed or not, so far as the International Lessons are concerned, he knows nothing, for the next lesson is concerned with the sacrifice of Isaac, of whose birth we have not been informed. From the story of Isaac we simply have the trivial narrative of the disputes about the wells. Then we bound forward again, and find Jacob at Bethel; who Jacob was, and why he was at Bethel, is left unexplained; the whole story of his adventures in Paddan-aram is omitted, and we are transported to the narrative of his dividing his flocks for fear of Esau his brother, and his subsequent wrestling. Esau has not so far been mentioned in the lessons, nor is there the slightest indication why Jacob should be afraid of him. Nor are we suffered to learn whether Jacob's measures to propitiate Esau were successful, for we leap forward again to the narrative of Joseph's being sold into Egypt.

Here, again, Joseph is completely unknown to us for all that the lessons have taught us; it is not even explained why it was that his brothers hated him. Next we find Joseph put in prison, and his interpretation of the butler's dream. Whether the dream is fulfilled or not we are not permitted to know, but we suddenly find Joseph exalted by Pharaoh, though Pharaoh's dream and Joseph's interpretation of it are alike left out. Then we skip again the whole story of the relation between Joseph and his brethren till we come to the actual revelation of Joseph to them in the forty-fifth chapter. What are we to think of a system that murders the whole story of Joseph in this way—a story almost unmatched in literature in its pathos and power? And all the rest of the history is omitted till we come to the death of Joseph. It is needless to multiply examples. The utterly incoherent conception of the history that our children are likely to get on this method surely does not need to be further established. The brief sections which are all that the system permits make this kind of thing inevitable. It is perfectly clear in my own mind that when passages are selected they ought for the most part to

be very much longer. It is much more important for the text to be known than for the teacher to spend a great deal of time expounding from a dozen or twenty verses ; and if selections have to be made, care should be taken that the narrative, as far as possible, runs on connectedly. Reading a few verses taken out of the middle of a story about characters of whom no previous information has been obtained must leave a most confused impression on the mind.

I am also constantly impressed by the choice of sections to be included or omitted. Where so little can be read the greatest care should be exercised to see that the essential things are not crowded out by the non-essential, and yet this is a test which the International Lessons are very far from satisfying. The length of lesson strikes one as often capriciously fixed. Sometimes a fairly long section of important and difficult doctrinal matter is chosen ; at another time the lesson may be shorter and consist of a perfectly simple and straightforward narrative, which needs scarcely any explanation. As an example of that one might take the story of the man born blind, which is broken off at the eleventh verse, though the whole of it would

have formed a quite manageable lesson. I have made a calculation of the number of lines devoted to each lesson taken in 1905 from the Gospel of John, and it does not altogether bear out the complaint that the lessons are cut down to an arbitrarily fixed limit. But a comparison of the various lessons both in respect to length and difficulty has left me quite in the dark as to the principles on which the number of verses chosen for a lesson has in many cases been determined. And I am bound to say that while I regard the International system as on the whole a large improvement on older methods, yet these methods in the hands of a judicious teacher had this advantage—that the amount of text read was very much greater. Where a dozen verses are read now, probably a whole chapter was read then, and the smallness of amount read is not readily compensated for by minuter or more exact study. We need to discriminate. There must be lessons which require a good deal of detailed explanation, but there are many other lessons where very little is required, and therefore where a large amount of text ought to be read. If a very easy narrative of twelve or fifteen verses is chosen for a



lesson, how is the teacher to fill in the time profitably? The lesson is quickly read, the slight difficulties are readily explained, the range of questions is small and soon exhausted, the lesson may lend itself to no very natural moral. Obviously, in such a case the lesson ought to be very much longer. I wish our Sunday School authorities could get firmly hold of the fact that the great thing that matters is not what the teachers have to say about the lesson, but knowledge of the text itself, and that these cramped and stunted sections ought to give place to sections a great deal longer.

Let us suppose that a boy learnt English History on the principles on which the Committee tries to teach Hebrew History. He would begin with the story of Julius Cæsar's landing in Britain. In all probability he would not learn whether the invasion had any consequence or not, because the next lesson he would have would be on King Alfred and the cakes. From this he would pass to the story of the Norman Conquest, and the next thing he would learn would be the story of Henry I., who never smiled again. From this he would skip to the story of Richard and Blondel, and then to King

John's treatment of Arthur, though probably he would learn nothing about Magna Charta. Then perhaps he would get the story of Becket's murder, and follow that up by the insurrection of Wat Tyler. Then several episodes from the French wars would probably be introduced, Crecy forming the subject of one lesson and Agincourt of the next. He would, I imagine, go on to learn how Clarence was drowned in a butt of Malmsey wine, and then how the princes died in the Tower. Next, the story of Perkin Warbeck would engage his attention, and then he would come to the degradation of Wolsey, illustrated by his famous speech from "Henry VIII." We cannot indeed be sure that he would get to know anything about the English Reformation, but he would probably learn that Mary expected that after she was dead Calais would be found written on her heart. In all likelihood the defeat of the Armada would be set forth at full length, and then Lady Jane Grey and Mary Queen of Scots might form the subject of another lesson. And so one might go on with the rest of the history. But what kind of knowledge of English History would such a course give ? The sense of it as a great connected

movement, as a mighty development, would be absolutely wanting, and even the very stories the boy was supposed to learn would lose half their meaning from his ignorance of their historical setting. Moreover, to make the parallel complete we should have to assume that not merely were the stories chosen quite disconnected, but that many of them were only half-told.

It has been urged in reply to my criticisms that the teacher could supply the connecting-links so that a consecutive story might be taught. The criticism is so obvious that my silence has no doubt suggested to many who read my articles that I attach no weight to it. Since, however, the point has been raised, I may briefly indicate why I cannot admit its force. Were I for any misdemeanour compelled to teach the International Lessons, I should as a matter of course do my best to bridge the gulfs that yawn between individual lessons, so far at least as to make each lesson intelligible. So much any competent teacher would strive to do. But are we to suppose that this can be safely left to the teacher's initiative, remembering that it is often with the incompetent that our classes are staffed? If a dozen verses are set, I greatly

fear that many will never think of travelling outside them. If they do, it will simply be to impart such information as will make the verses with which they are dealing more or less intelligible. They may probably have no sense of the need for exhibiting the connected movement in the history. Each snippet would be largely independent of all the rest. Even were this not the case, the teacher would find the task of spanning the gaps in many cases quite beyond him. If my critics would take the pains to work through the lessons, they would come to understand what the task really involved. Let the reader take the Book of Genesis and my analysis of the International Lessons drawn from that book. Let him observe how large the omitted sections often are, and he will quickly discover that if the selected portion is to be read and expounded, the time is utterly inadequate for narrating even in a clear summary the stories that have been excluded. But even if the teacher were quite alive to the necessity, and the material not too extensive to be treated in this way, there still remains a very important objection. The course suggested would mean that these narratives would not be read in the

language of incomparable power and beauty in which the Bible presents them, but told in such language as the teacher may be able to command. It may be picturesque and even eloquent, but at the best it will be far below the words of Scripture. It is much more likely, however, to be flat and prosy, a bare outline of salient facts with little colour or vivacity, and with no beauty of expression. Style in conversation is inevitably at a much lower level than that of great literature. No one would attempt in ordinary talk to model his language on Shakespeare or the Bible. But such is the magic of expression that much of the Bible cannot be turned into everyday language without losing all the haunting charm of its music and much of its emotional value. Everyone will feel what I mean if the experiment be thought of in connection with some great passage. Let me quote the exquisite close of the seventh chapter of the Revelation :—"These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His Temple : and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall



hunger no more, neither thirst any more ; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters : and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

Will anyone venture to give the gist of this in conversational English ? But quite apart from the irreparable loss that a summary inflicts on the expression, in which so much of the inspiration resides, there is all the other loss of intimate acquaintance with the details of the story. And we must add to this that inasmuch as the pupil gets the story at second hand, he gets of it only what the teacher is able to transmit, certainly limited and not improbably distorted. What he ought to be getting is an immediate impression of the text ; what he actually gets is his impression of the teacher's impression. And not all of that probably, for the teacher, especially if he is not imaginative enough to put himself in the place of his pupils, is likely to take much for granted with which the class is unfamiliar.

## NOTE

I have been criticised for omitting to notice that the International Lesson, as printed in the official syllabus, embraces a good deal more than the passages of which I have spoken. It is perfectly true that in the official syllabus issued from America these additions are given, but the criticism, I believe, alters matters very little. In the first place, the International Lesson is certainly understood generally to be the fragment of 10 to 16 verses. For example, in the list published by the Sunday School Union, it is simply these that are given as the lesson for the individual Sundays, and in several of the lesson expositions that are published account is not taken of anything beyond this, so that a very large proportion of the teachers are probably entirely unaware that anything else is suggested. In the next place, they are apparently chosen for the teacher's use. The additional readings vary very much in length, sometimes they embrace several chapters. We may infer with confidence from this fact that they are not intended to be read in class, which is the really

vital matter, but are part of the teacher's preparation, and in a large number of cases are such as any competent teacher's common sense would suggest to him. Or they may, of course, be intended for the scholars' own reading in the week. It is, of course, excellent to get the children to read the Bible as much as possible during the week, but what guarantee have we that this is done? It remains true that the amount read in class is altogether insufficient, and that is all that we can count on the children's getting in a very large number of instances. The sections vary considerably in character. Sometimes they are illustrative. For example, in 1907 the first lesson is on Genesis i. 1-25; on this John i. 1-5 is to be read. Often they are designed to connect the lessons, and it throws a rather lurid light on the extent of the gaps that in several cases we have a considerable number of chapters. For March 10, for example, Genesis xx.-xxvi. is given as the portion to be read, while on April 14 we again have seven chapters—namely, xxix.-xxxv., and so on May 12. In the present year, where the lessons are taken from the Synoptic Gospels, the readings are often of the parallels in other

Gospels. In several cases there is no additional reading suggested. For example, on the Life-giving Stream, a recent lesson taken from Ezekiel xlvii. 1-12, no additional reading is suggested. One of the oddest things I have noticed in this connection is that on Zechariah iv. 1-10 instruction is given to study the chapter and read Zechariah i.-viii. The suggestion brings home to one very forcibly how much need there is for a change. What are the teachers (I leave the pupils out of account) to make of such extremely difficult matter as these chapters? But, as I say, these additional readings make no practical difference to my criticisms. In justice to the International Committee, however, I mention them.

## CHAPTER V

### CONSTRUCTIVE SUGGESTIONS FOR JUNIOR CLASSES

BUT when we have reached the conclusion that the present system is fundamentally unsatisfactory only half our work has been done. It is an improvement on the system it superseded, it holds the field, it secures for the teacher a large amount of expert help, and those who are dissatisfied may still think that change would be undesirable unless we can secure that something very much better should be substituted, and that here, too, the teacher should not be abandoned to his own resources. I approach, therefore, the constructive part of my discussion.

It is quite clear that with the younger children the teaching should be of a less abstract character than with the older children. They need history rather than metaphysics, facts rather than ideas. Yet, if we are to have a connected system we ought to select the facts taught in the earlier stages with a view to the ideas that we hope to



teach in the later. The theology in which we wish to instruct them before they leave the Sunday School should be based on the facts which have engaged their thoughts in the earlier stages. Now, our own sacred books are peculiarly adapted for this, inasmuch as they contain a large element of story. It is a distinctive feature of Scripture that its revelation is a process in history, and it follows from this that a knowledge of the history is necessary to the full understanding of the revelation. Much of the Old Testament, especially in the prophets, is, apart from such knowledge, almost unintelligible. If we make the Bible our text-book it is important for us to understand the principles on which the Bible is constructed. I am not referring here so much to its structure as disclosed by critical analysis, or the stages by which it came into existence, but to the broad fact that it is pre-eminently historical in its method. This is a fact of extraordinary importance to all who recognise that the Bible contains a Divine revelation. For it is not a meaningless thing that God has chosen this method rather than another to impart the knowledge of Himself. It might easily seem to readers who take the common,

unhistorical view of the Bible, as if there is much in it that is wholly irrelevant to the purpose of a revelation. This simply means that they are looking at the Bible in a fundamentally wrong way, and are trying it by inappropriate canons. It would be very easy, and would, indeed, be a profitable task to show how much the Bible gains as a revelation just through the fact that it enshrines a history instead of being a text-book of dogmatics. Here I must simply assume that my readers are prepared to grant me that the form which the Bible has taken is one that we cannot disregard without placing ourselves at a wrong point of view for appreciating its significance. It is, accordingly, in the whole movement that the vital meaning of the Old Testament resides. The question whether we understand the Old Testament is not to be decided by the detailed knowledge we may have of its parts, but by our familiarity with it as a great connected whole. Does the Old Testament religion live for us as a great organism whose life-history we follow from point to point, and which we understand through all stages of its development? That is the ultimate goal of Old Testament study, and it dictates the course

we ought to take in studying it. Now, this history of the religion is vitally associated throughout with the history of the people, and neither can be understood apart from the other. While, therefore, it is not an object of direct religious import for us to know the history of the people of Israel, yet indirectly that knowledge is essential for all who would understand the history of the religion. In antiquity religion and nationality were closely interwoven in a way altogether strange to us, so that it is not unnecessary to insist that the student should familiarise himself with the political and social life of the nation if he desires to comprehend its religious history. It is, therefore, a fortunate thing that so much of the Old Testament is concerned with matters that seem at first sight remote from religion, and yet really are a most precious help to our grasp of Hebrew religion. And this large historical element, I repeat, makes certain parts of the Old Testament peculiarly suited to the capacities of children. And instruction here supplies an excellent basis for what definitely theological teaching is to be given at a later stage.

And what is true of the Old Testament is true

also of the New. Here, too, religion is inseparably associated with history. Certain historical facts are an integral part of it, and the revelation itself is largely mediated through history. Five of the books are histories, and even the Epistles largely deal with concrete historical situations, apart from a comprehension of which their religious teaching cannot fully be understood. And I specially wish to emphasise in this connection the great fact that Christianity is peculiarly a religion of a person. This dictates for us our mode of approach to it as students, and as in the Old Testament this quality makes it much easier to elaborate a method of instruction suitable for younger, as well as older, scholars. The central element, accordingly, in the earlier part of Sunday School teaching should be a thorough drilling in the first three Gospels. If we wish to bring the pupils to our view of the Person of Christ, it is much the best way that they should come to it through history. This was, in fact, the method adopted by Jesus in His self-disclosure to His disciples. He did not begin with doctrines about Himself or His work. He attached His followers to Himself by His teaching and the indefinable charm of His

personality. He allowed His words and works to make their own impression, until by the very force of them they were brought to confess Him as the Christ, the Son of the living God. It is quite clear that this method was the best to impress on their minds the truth He wished them to learn. He did not impose it on them as a matter of authoritative dogma, or bias their judgment by any premature disclosure. He left them quite free to form their own conclusion on the facts before them, and come gradually to it as the unforced inference from the facts. They thus had a firmer hold on the truth than would otherwise have been possible. For had they received it on authority it would have hung by that single thread ; but when it was a conviction which had been woven out of many strands into an irresistible inference, then it was not likely to snap so readily. The facts were guaranteed to them by their own observation in a way that a claim based on authority could not have been. In other words, the doctrine had to be kept in the background in its own interests. Now, of course, it is true that this principle must be taken with some qualification. We cannot put our children back into the position of



Christ's first disciples. They are living in an atmosphere saturated with Christian feelings and ideas ; they are constantly hearing things said which imply the Christian view of Christ's Person ; in other words, they are being prejudiced towards the Christian doctrine by the authority of their environment. We could not wish it to be otherwise in their case, but it is all the more imperative that this unconscious imbibing of belief on authority should be supplemented and supported by instruction in history. And how important this instruction in the facts of the Gospel history is will be clear from several considerations. In the first place, as with the disciples so here, this method provides a far firmer foundation for faith. It rests not on mere speculation, but on facts, and those the facts which demand and justify the account of them given by Christian theology. Just as historically the facts suggested the theology, so it should be in the case of children. When we remember the strain to which faith will later be exposed, it is our duty to see that it is as strongly buttressed as possible. If through intimate knowledge of that history the Church doctrine of the Person of Christ has been, if not created,

at least supported and filled with content, then when from the sheltered atmosphere of the home and school the boy passes into the more testing atmosphere of professional or business life, his faith in Jesus will resist all the more firmly the attacks made upon it that it is not held simply on authority, but rooted firmly in fact.

And this leads me to the second reason, which is that there is an unreality about abstract dogmatics, until they are filled with a content of facts. Propositions about God and Christ may be unintelligible or misleading to children, who have not learnt what definite ideas should be attached to the names. It is only when the facts about Christ have been imparted that it is safe to teach dogmas about Him. It is quite possible to have a theological Jesus who has little in common with the historical Jesus but the name. To teach our children that Jesus is the Son of God without telling them what Jesus is, is to give them an abstract proposition without filling it with the necessary content of living fact. There is a danger that the theological facts themselves may be misconceived unless we fill them with what we learn from the

Gospel history. But further, experience warns us that where the historical Jesus is withdrawn from view, the theological conception itself tends to become perverted. Would the cult of the Virgin Mary, of Joseph, and of the saints in the Roman Church have ever reached its present proportions among a people familiar with the details of our Lord's life? However theologians may distinguish technically between the worship accorded to Mary and that accorded to Christ, it remains true that to the popular mind Christ is obscured behind the Virgin. We can secure His true place in our religious life only by firmly insisting that the Christ of theology is to be known through the Jesus of history.

In the third place, the vital matter in the construction of a theology is to gain a true conception of God. This conception controls the whole system, and if God be wrongly conceived, the theology will be distorted throughout. If, then, right ideas of God are so supremely important, it is essential that we should take the greatest care to obtain them. No source of knowledge is comparable with the earthly life of Christ. We recognise in Him the supreme revealer of God. Now, what we mean by this is not simply

that Jesus has given us higher teaching about God than any other religion has given. That of course, is true, and Christ's teaching of the Fatherhood of God created a new epoch in religion. Not in the mere use of the term, for in the contemporary Jewish theology the term was not uncommonly applied to God, but it was not with all the wealth of meaning that He put into it, in the whole attitude towards God and the world and the human soul that He based upon it. And yet, while no teaching about God is so important as His, we can never say too strongly that the supreme revelation that Jesus gave of God did not consist in what He said about God. It was rather in what He was and in what He did that this revelation was supremely contained. He was the Son of God living in the terms of human life, the Eternal in the conditions of space and time. Accordingly His character and life are the most authentic revelation we have of the character of God. They are the most authentic inasmuch as they come with the guarantee, not of words, which may be mere brilliant speculations, but of actual experience. They are also by far the fullest, for character is so subtle and elusive a thing that words

cannot fix and express it in any but a clumsy and approximate way, while life reveals it in all its innumerable and delicate shades. The words of Jesus are a description of God, the life of Jesus is a photograph of Him. Thus our most vivid thoughts of God come to us from our knowledge of the life of Christ ; in it we see the life and character of God translated before our eyes. When we remember how the whole quality of a religion is determined by its conception of God, we shall realise how necessary it is that the worthiest and most vivid idea of Him should be formed. Otherwise a false strain may easily enter at the start and vitiate the whole theology. But this is not all. The life of Jesus is for us the perfect realisation of the ideal attitude of man to God. He is not only the revealer of God, but as the Son of Man who is also Son of God He exhibits the true filial relationship to God, to the type of which we ought all to be conformed. It is, therefore, very necessary for the practice of the Christian life that the standard of Christian character should be studied in its classical expression in the life of Christ.

Once more we find in the study of the life



of Christ a far more powerful incentive than in the study of a scheme of doctrine. The place assigned to the Person of Christ in Christianity is a guarantee for intensity in religion and uprightness in conduct. It is true that there are some who are capable of a passion for an idea ; a great thought has the power of stimulating them to enthusiasm and controlling their lives. Nevertheless, it is true that the vast majority of people are far more affected by their relation to a person. It is not an exaggeration to say that the person of Jesus has evoked a passionate devotion unparalleled in the world's history. Now I fully believe that the theological conception of Jesus has done much in this respect. The story of His great surrender in the Incarnation and His death for human salvation, quite apart from anything else, are capable of evoking enthusiastic gratitude and affection. Yet we cannot rest content with this. If Jesus has done so much for us, we cannot be satisfied to know simply the theological facts about Him. Moreover it is just the story of the earthly career which comes close home to us and gives us our fullest insight into the character of Christ.

Enthusiasm for a person and loyalty to him are the most effective discipline and inspiration, but they cannot continue to exist apart from such knowledge of the person as will justify them in moments of depression and cold reflection, or endow them with imperious sanctions when the soul is exposed to gusts of temptation.

These reasons will perhaps establish the necessity of placing in the forefront of the religious education of the younger children instruction in the life of Christ especially as presented in the Synoptic Gospels. The Fourth Gospel, as an interpretation of the life of Christ, should come at a more advanced stage.

I am so impressed with the importance of bringing children into contact with the historical Christ that at the risk of repetition I must touch on the plea that finds favour in some quarters, that our stress should lie on the living rather than the historical Christ. How, may I ask, are we to gain our knowledge of Him? Is it to be through interpretation of the facts of our own spiritual experience? Let us not despise the knowledge of the man, spoken of by Dr. Dale, who knew nothing of Christ except the bare fact that He had saved him. But who could

rest content with that ? Would not any man who had passed through so great a crisis, and knew that he owed his salvation to Christ, be eager to learn about Him all that could be known ? And to what dangers would he not be exposed if he sought to understand the character of Christ from his spiritual experience ? He would create a Christ according to his own imagination. If such false ideas are to be avoided we have a very sure safeguard. The study of the historical Christ is the best guide to a knowledge of the living Christ. He is now in character what He was on earth ; and where we have certainties, why should we neglect them for fancies, which will react on our conceptions of God, and so on our religion as a whole ? For if we read Christ wrongly, it is not possible for us to read God aright. It is, of course, understood that the great redemptive facts, the death and resurrection, must be treated as part of this body of teaching about the historical Christ. No doubt, what weighs with many in their distrust of the teaching of which I have spoken is, that these facts are supposed to be ignored. But this is not intended in what has been said.

It is more important that familiarity with the story should be attained than that much time should be spent in expounding it. With many teachers exposition is likely to mean simply an extravagant dilution of the milk of the Word. Effort should not be expended in saying over again in ten weak sentences what the evangelist contrives to pack into one terse and forcible sentence ; what explanation is required may be discovered by judicious questioning, and this should of course be applied ; but the teacher's main energy should be directed to seeing that the facts and teaching are riveted in the child's memory. This may be accomplished directly and indirectly ; directly by reading the narrative itself and by searching questioning, but indirectly by getting the child to work through the material without realising what he is doing. The knowledge that soaks in unconsciously in this way helps to fix the direct learning. For example, the teacher proposes to his class that they should find out all they can about the Apostle Peter in the Gospel of Matthew, or collect our Lord's utterances on prayer in the Gospel of Luke. That is the direct object the child has in view, and he sees nothing beyond it ; the search is

itself an object of interest for him. But the teacher has something further in mind. He knows that this cannot be done without at least a cursory search through the Gospel. And he counts that this rapid running through the Gospel, with a particular end in view, will do something to familiarise the child still further with the contents and to impress more strongly upon him what he has already learnt. Or, turning aside from the Gospels for a moment to illustrate the principle, the teacher might take Paul's account of the dangers and persecutions he had encountered in the course of his ministry, and ask his class to find out from the Acts of the Apostles how many of these were mentioned in the story. This would have several valuable results. In the first place it would familiarise the child with that great piece of autobiography in II Corinthians. Next it would convey a deep impression as to the character of the apostle, his enthusiasm, his freedom from self-seeking, his readiness to confront the utmost peril in pursuit of his duty. It would be a noble ethical lesson enshrined in splendid language. But over and above this it would ensure that if the task was faithfully accomplished the relevant



sections in the Acts would have to be read rather carefully. And, lastly, the negative result that so many of the incidents named by Paul were not to be found in the Acts of the Apostles at all would be of value, for it would help the pupil to understand how rich in heroic incident, beyond what he had guessed from the Acts, was the apostle's life, and in that way stimulate his enthusiasm for the apostle and the sense of his greatness. The teacher would naturally use this as an opportunity to impress various important lessons, but would carry the story forward beyond the Acts and the Epistles, and point out how Paul's career reached a fitting climax in his martyrdom. He would urge on his class the incomparable worth of a Gospel and the tremendous urgency for its proclamation, which nerved the apostle to flinch from no peril that he might pursue his unrelenting activity as a missionary; and the responsibility of the Church for missionary enterprise and evangelistic work could be forced home by the power of his example. Again it might be pointed out that it is by a mere accident that we hear of these things at all, that it is only because Paul has been basely attacked by unscrupulous foes that he

reluctantly tells the story, and the virtue of reticence about one's own work could well be inculcated. Or I may take another example; the teacher may set his pupils to find out from the Epistles of Paul how much information they give as to the earthly life of Jesus. He might restrict the search in the first instance to Romans, Corinthians, and Galatians, as the all but universally accepted writings of the apostle. This would have some value in familiarising them with these Epistles, though of course in a very superficial way, but it would also provide a useful basis for an apologetic argument at a later stage. The teacher should continually be practising ingenious devices of this kind. He should set his scholars definite aims, which for them will be an end in themselves, but for him simply means to a larger end. But of course he should not stop with the Gospel teaching. Variety should be sought and interest stimulated by selection of those parts of the Old and New Testament which are suited to children. So far as possible these should be read in block and not in snippets, and the teacher should beware of seeking to force morals on the narratives whether they are susceptible to suitable morals or not. It may well be the

case that certain narratives which it is highly desirable that children should know may be capable of no such moral as is suited to a child. But let him know the story, and then, as life opens out to him and experience broadens and deepens, the story which he first learnt as a story, and nothing more, will come home to him with a wholly new meaning and power. We ought to be willing to trust the Bible to make its own impression rather more than we often do. If the Bible maintains its footing in the Day School, the work of the Sunday School teacher in this respect will be materially lightened ; but in the uncertainty that hangs over the whole of this problem at the present time, it will not be wise for us to build too much upon this.

But should nothing beyond this simple teaching of Bible history be attempted for the young children ? I should add to it, in the first place, the committing to memory of verses or short passages of Scripture selected with extreme care. It is quite a question whether much learning by heart should be attempted at all, and if comparatively little is attempted it is obvious that great care ought to be taken that the right things should be learnt. It would be well worth

while for some competent person to compile a list of really golden texts that a child ought to learn. The present selection of golden texts seems to me to be compiled on a wrong method. The idea is to have a text in close connection with the lesson for the day ; frequently it is chosen from that lesson, though in many cases this is not so. But the idea is, I imagine, to send home the lesson by some passage connected with it. I think it will be clear on reflection that the golden texts should be cut completely loose from the lessons. If that is not done the range of choice is seriously restricted and the pupil is set to learn a large number of texts, his knowledge of which is comparatively immaterial whereas many others with which he ought to be familiar are crowded out. This preferential treatment of the non-essential is one of the weaknesses of the whole system, but a change at this point could be made with the greatest ease. The Bible should be carefully searched by some really competent authorities, and the best texts should be selected. They should then be carefully arranged, consideration being given to length and to subject-matter. The very short texts could be kept for the juniors, longer ones

for those who were older, and then they should be so arranged that the pupil could pass by an easy gradation through the whole range of subjects treated. At a later point rather longer passages might be learnt. The making of this selection is not a matter to occupy spare fragments of time ; the utmost pains should be taken to secure the best selection, and when that has been done the list should be submitted to other authorities who could suggest texts to be added or substituted. Such a selection would, of course, include the Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes, the two great commandments, I Corinthians xiii., Psalms like the 23rd or the 91st, and many detached sentences. Mere feats of memory should be discouraged. It is, for example, almost sheer waste of time to set any ordinary child learning the 119th Psalm. I have been criticised for saying this on the ground that Ruskin learnt the 119th Psalm, and spoke very strongly in later life of the preciousness of that Psalm to him. This altogether misses my point. I am not suggesting legislation for juvenile Ruskins, but for those whose education has to be carried on in absolutely different conditions. It is not for those who are saturated with Scripture that



we have to cater, but for those whose knowledge of Scripture is likely at the best to be extremely meagre. That such children should not be set to learn 176 verses in praise of the Pentateuchal Law is a matter of the plainest common-sense ; it is mischievous simply because it prevents them learning things of much greater importance. They are perfectly welcome to learn the 119th Psalm as far as I am concerned when they have learnt the essential things and much besides, which, while less essential, is more important than that Psalm. To store the memory with the choicest and best passages of Scripture, with those that will mean most to the child later and be most helpful to him in times of stress, that is an acquisition of the most valuable kind.

There is a simple matter that may well be attended to early—that is, to drill the children in the order of books of the Bible. The actual structure of the Old and New Testament as detected by scholars may come at a later stage, but the child should learn the main divisions of Scripture first, beginning with the fundamental distinction between Old and New Testament, then the division of the former into Pentateuch, historical books, poetical books and

Prophets, and the division of the latter into Gospels, Acts, Epistles, and Revelation. Such a division, it is true, is not perfectly exact, but it is a rough approximation which will be sufficient at this stage. After that has been done they can be taken on to the detailed composition of each section, learning the order in which the books occur in each. This is a little matter, but it is ridiculous for anyone who has passed through the Sunday School not to be able to find his way about the Bible.

But if the life and character of Jesus are the chief subject of study the question is naturally raised, Should dogmatic teaching be given to children at all? This is a difficult problem, but the following principles should be borne in mind. It is not possible while we remain thinking beings to avoid a theology, since we must have some account of our religion to satisfy our intellect. Hence theology can never die while religion lives. I have no sympathy whatever with the too popular outcry against theology. But if theology is to be a science, and command the attention of an age steeped in the scientific method, it must be everywhere in close contact with the facts of life and experience. To adopt the old

method of starting with assumptions that could not be verified and spinning strings of inferences from them is to discredit theology. It is best to start from facts. Take, for example, the doctrine of sin. Of what use is it to begin by teaching children the dogma of original sin? There is an unreality in it to the child's mind and questions are raised by it that baffle the wisest theologians. It is much to be thankful for if a crude presentation of the doctrine, isolated and misunderstood, does not fatally warp his moral ideas. But if we really wish to teach the child about sin, his own consciousness of sin will be a starting-point from which such teaching may be effectively given. Similarly with the doctrines of the Divinity of Christ and the Trinity. The important thing is not to teach the abstract doctrines, but the facts on which the doctrines rest. These doctrines were constructed not from pure delight in framing complex theological propositions, but rather to do justice to certain facts; and if the doctrines are to be firmly they must be intelligently held, and that is possible only when the facts are seen to suggest them. These facts are especially those brought before us in the life and words

of Christ. But while I held that there is a legitimate place for speculative theology, I so far sympathise with those who roundly affirm that dogma is entirely unsuited to the child's mind as to consider that no systematic exposition of doctrine ought to be attempted at this stage. I see no reason, however, for being pedantic in this matter ; personally I should not object to a very simple catechism, which would have to be very much simpler than any published catechism known to me. About catechisms in general I shall say something later, so I do not stay to discuss them at this point. For the most part, however, I think that dogmatic teaching at this stage should come indirectly, and that attention should not be called to it.

A great deal should, of course, be made of singing in the junior departments of the school, and here there is scope for much indirect doctrinal teaching. The thought expressed in beautiful words, linked to favourite tunes, and sung with pleasure by the children, is unconsciously assimilated by the child, and he is gradually brought into sympathy with the deepest truths of religion. But here great discrimination is required, for this is one of the points which needs the most

careful and anxious watching. Hymns exert so enormous an influence on the religious training of children in those receptive and impressionable years that those who are charged with their selection should consider this one of their most responsible tasks. There are hymns, the knowledge of which is a permanent enrichment; but there are others which are mere religious twaddle done into rhyme and cut up into metrical lengths; they are flat, weak, empty, silly, they are to-day unhappily, but luckily to-morrow they will be cast into the oven. It is not hymns of this kind that our children should be taught. I look back with resentment at the Sunday afternoons that used to be spent in learning and practising jingling trash for anniversaries or other functions, the sheer incapacity the hymns betrayed in their authors being matched by the lack of judgment in those who selected them for us to learn. Occasionally, one gets an insight into the same kind of thing to-day. It will be a great advance when Sunday School authorities are content to renounce once for all these gaudy novelties in their anniversary programmes, and if they must have special singing make it a time for teaching the children the



great classical hymns. What are commonly called children's hymns may well be everything that a hymn ought to be. It is quite astonishing, indeed, how many of the most popular children's hymns are hymns about heaven. Old associations still exercise such power over me that I never hear some of these hymns sung without being much moved by them. Yet it may well be questioned whether this constant reference to heaven is quite natural, and whether it is not likely to introduce a morbid hot-house quality into religion. Naturally, such hymns as "Is there room for Mary there?" in which little Mary, having her mother at an unfair advantage, lectures her from the vantage-ground of a death-bed, are quite unfit for use in the Sunday School, or anywhere else where it is desirable to inculcate respect for parents. While a certain proportion of children's hymns should be chosen for use in the school, and these may with advantage be selected and the selection made be adapted to different ages, it is a mistake to think that children should be taught children's hymns and no others. It is surely undesirable to level everything down to their comprehension. The very feeling that the meaning largely eludes

their grasp is of value, since it awes them with a sense of mystery. But quite apart from that, there is much in the great hymns which will have a real meaning to them. And I do feel strongly how important it is that they should learn many things when they are young, the full value of which will be discovered only in later years. Hence I should certainly see that such hymns as "Rock of Ages," "Jesus, lover of my soul," "Our God, our help in ages past," "Souls of men, why will ye scatter," "When I survey the wondrous Cross," and others of similar standing should become very familiar to the children. In learning to sing these hymns they are learning theology without knowing it, and free from the repellent qualities that an abstract science has for the young. Hymns that definitely aim at teaching theology are probably bad hymns, and should be rigorously boycotted. Beyond what I have said, I should at this stage make no attempt to teach Doctrine, or Apologetics, or Biblical Theology, or criticism. There is another matter to which I attach much importance, great care should be taken that the child-like type of piety is preserved. It should be natural and spontaneous, not forced and artificial,

for nothing will prove more fatal than unreality. It is most disastrous when any attempt is made to cast it in a mould suited to the piety of older people. There is nothing so beautiful as the piety of a little child, and Jesus never said that little children were to become like us, but that we were to become like little children.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONSTRUCTIVE SUGGESTIONS FOR SENIOR CLASSES

I NOW pass on to the question of older scholars, from whom more may reasonably be expected. First, let me recur to my fundamental principle, the need for a comprehensive view in preference to the accumulation of details. Detail, of course, must be known, but we must know it in relation to the whole. It is good for us to accumulate facts, but facts are of little use to us unless we can "place" them.

Accordingly, at this stage a resolute attempt should be made to provide the scholars with outlines, with a sketch map of the country, so to speak, on which they can fill in the details for themselves in their proper place. So long as knowledge is unsorted and undigested it is only the raw material of education; it needs to be classified, to be exhibited in its right relations and true proportions, to be brought into connection with other knowledge. And

this can be done only as the student has in mind a general scheme into which the particular bits of information will fit. A list of leading dates in the history of Israel and primitive Christianity should be prepared. It ought not to be too elaborate, for its value does not consist so much in itself as in its helpfulness to the student in giving him the correct sequence of events. The chaos of impressions that Bible reading too often produces would be largely reduced to cosmos by a little attention to chronology. If possible the pupils should know these dates as they know their multiplication table. They are often only approximate, but they will be of great service in giving a grip of the history. Unless the history is known the revelation which came through it must be imperfectly understood. Some conception of the land which was the scene of the sacred history will also be valuable, though we must always beware of supposing that either chronology or geography, or much else that passes for Biblical knowledge, is worth anything in itself. It is only as it helps us to apprehend the essential meaning of the Bible that all this is indispensable; what goes beyond this is antiquarian lumber that is wholly out of place in the



Sunday School. It is also necessary for the pupils to have some familiarity with the outlines of Old and New Testament Introduction. To become an expert in these subjects involves years of toil, but the outstanding results are fairly accessible, and it is not difficult to appropriate the generally received findings of scholarship.

If we follow the practice of studying the History of Israel on the one hand and the life of Jesus with the History of the Early Church on the other, using the Bible as our text-book, the least that we can do would be to divide the history into two parts. The younger pupils might read the earlier history and narrative sections of the Bible down to the death of Elisha, leaving the rest of the history for the older pupils, who, however, should complete this course by the time they are fifteen. Similarly in the New Testament the division might be made at the death of Stephen. The reason for these limits will, I think, be quite obvious. In the Old Testament history the narrative books supply practically the whole of the material required for the first section, and the scene of the story is restricted almost entirely to Palestine.

But when we pass to the second section the case is altered. The horizon widens out to take in the politics of great empires, apart from some comprehension of which the movement of Hebrew history cannot be understood. And in addition to that we have now to go outside the narrative books for much of our Old Testament material; in other words, the Prophets become often our main sources for understanding the course of events and reproducing the social, political and religious conditions. This portion of the history is accordingly much the more difficult and may well be reserved for pupils from twelve to fifteen. And similarly in the New Testament the life of Jesus and the history of the Church to the death of Stephen are practically restricted to Palestinian soil and do not require illustration from any other part of the New Testament. When we come to the history of the Church from the conversion of Paul, we find the Gospel spreading far beyond Palestine, and much of our historical material has to be put together from the Epistles. The New Testament is accordingly precisely analogous to the Old in this respect. In both the division should come where the history bursts its Pales-

tinian boundaries, and where prophets or Epistles begin to contribute their share.

But what about the crown of all Biblical study—I mean Biblical Theology? It would be disastrous were this to be excluded, though whether it should be introduced before the age of fifteen is another question. At any rate, it is useless to attempt teaching it on present methods. This is the case pre-eminently where selected portions of Scripture as the basis of a lesson are almost useless. The prophets, for example, are far too difficult to be taught on present methods; a system of short lessons cannot be successfully applied to them, even if there were time. Yet to leave out the prophets is to miss the heart of the religion of Israel; and no course of instruction can be considered satisfactory unless it gives the scholars some insight into their teaching. This can be given by a teacher who has qualified himself by careful study of one or more of the numerous cheap handbooks on this subject. It is a mistake, in my judgment, to regard this kind of teaching as beyond the reach of our scholars in the upper classes of the school. It is quite possible to make the teaching simple, if only sufficient pains

be taken by the teacher to understand the subject-matter and the conditions out of which it came.

For the sake of indicating what might be done, I will run rapidly over the prophetic movement.

It is not of special importance that our children should be familiar with the early history of prophecy ; its universal significance begins rather with Elijah. Here emphasis should be laid on two things, his conflict with the worship of the Tyrian Baal as untrue to the genius of Israel's religion, and his denunciation of the judicial murder of Naboth. In this combination of elevated religion with uncompromising morality he foreshadows the movement which prophecy is to take.

Elisha is of less significance for the history of religion, so I pass on to the great literary prophets. They burst upon us in the middle of the eighth century as stormy petrels uttering their presage of imminent disaster. The brilliant military success of Jeroboam the Second and the expansion of national life had sapped the integrity of the people. A gorgeous and elaborate religion went hand in hand with flagrant oppression and

vice. Amos, the earliest of our canonical prophets, was the unflinching prophet of Yahweh's righteousness. To a people infatuated with the conviction that because Israel was the elect of Yahweh He would secure it against all disaster, he utters the tremendous words: "You only have I known of all the nations of the earth, therefore I will visit upon you all your iniquities." He pleads that oppression may cease and justice be done; civic morality is his main concern, and for its absence no religious devotion can atone. But since Israel is an unrighteous people and refuses to reform, the destruction of the nation by a righteous God is a prophetic certainty to him. Hence, while the people of the northern kingdom looked forward only to more splendid achievements, the prophet's conviction of inevitable doom had trained his sensitiveness to divine the future. Hence he heard Assyria stir in her lethargy, and foresaw the time when she would wake once more to resume her victorious march and trample Israel in the dust as she passed forward to the conquest of Egypt. And side by side with him there rose another prophet, a sweeter and more gracious spirit, yet as inflexible in his ethical demand as Amos had



been. In the agony of his own tragic experience he had learnt to understand the heart of God wrung with pain for Israel's unfaithfulness. It is in this unfaithfulness to her God that Hosea finds the secret of all her sin and the punishment that sin was bringing with it. Yet out of a deeper anguish than Amos had ever known he plucks a hope that Amos had not been able to reach. Since Yahweh loves Israel, He can never let her go till discipline has done its work, and the old happy relations between them have been resumed. These two were the only literary prophets who worked in the northern kingdom, whose writings have come down to us. The prophecy of Amos was soon fulfilled, and Israel stumbled blindly through a period of anarchy to utter destruction.

But when Samaria fell in B.C. 722 there was already at work a prophet in the southern kingdom. Across the long centuries that divide us from Isaiah of Jerusalem, through the disguise of an English translation and the obscurity of dimly-apprehended circumstance, we see the figure of the prophet and statesman loom gigantically before us. One of the most powerful poets

among a people conspicuous for poetical genius, a statesman prescient and undismayed, a social reformer, scourging with a merciless lash the scandalous administration of justice, the greedy rapacity of magnates and the down-treading of the poor that stained his country, he was all these things because he had seen the Holy God and his lips had been touched by the glowing coal. We stand with him at the temple entrance and share his ecstasy as the scales fall from his eyes and he sees the Lord of Hosts enthroned in majesty. We listen with him to the song of the seraphim as they chant the praise of His holiness. We feel the threshold rock beneath our feet and watch how the smoke of Divine anger resents the presence of the unclean. And then, as we wait with him for his message, with what a chill it strikes us to know that all the prophet's ministry is to be a failure, hardening the people till stroke after stroke of judgment devastates the unhappy land! We watch him through his ministry, shaming the unbelief and panic of Ahaz by the faith of the humble mother, who will call her child Immanuel, in serene assurance that God is with His people; blazing with uncontrollable passion to see the grandees

grind the faces of the poor and the judges betray the cause of the oppressed ; menacing the haughty pride of man with tidings of swift abasement ; lashing the vices of the men and the follies of the women ; looking stedfastly through all to the sifting judgment from which a remnant only should survive, and beyond it to the glories of the Messianic age. Is it not a great enrichment of our literary sense to steep ourselves in that glorious poetry, the magnificent scorn, the noble indignation, the lurid pictures of doom, the glowing predictions of a blessed future ?

It must, of course, be remembered that very much in the book of Isaiah belongs to other authors. It is, indeed, a great gain that scholarship has here brought to us. It has shown that the book which for two thousand years has been regarded as the work of one supreme genius is the production of many writers, and this has brought home to us with great power how much more widely diffused in Israel was the spirit of inspiration than former ages had suspected. But even when much that passed for Isaiah's has been proved to be the work of others, he remains one of the mightiest figures of Hebrew history.

The other pre-exilic prophets we may pass by with bare mention—Micah with his passionate denunciation of tyranny and prediction of desolating judgment; the unknown prophet who taught his people that all the demand of heaven was that they should do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with their God; Nahum with his fierce exultation over the approaching destruction of Nineveh; Zephaniah with his elaborate description of the day of the Lord—and come to Jeremiah. Here, as in the case of Hosea, we have to observe how the tragedy of his own life created his greatest doctrine. A man of the deepest tenderness, and inspired by the loftiest patriotism, it was his pain to pass long, hopeless years watching his country sink to her ruin. His prophecies of disaster were met with incredulous optimism, his appeals for reform elicited no response. Staggering under the burden of a task too heavy for his frail humanity, he is goaded forward on his reluctant path by the imperious will of a stronger Power. Complaint and protest are all in vain, the fire will not be quenched within him. The butt of his people's ridicule, the victim of the malice of those whom he sought to save, his

heart rent with anguish for himself and his people, he was driven again and again upon God, driven past the national relationship to Him into personal fellowship. And this experience, at first the fleeting refuge of a desperate spirit, became at last habitual. Thus he came to understand that the relation of the individual to God was not simply mediated through the nation, but was an intimate personal fellowship between God and the human soul. Thus in his great doctrine of the New Covenant he effected one of the profoundest transformations that religion has ever known, and became one of the mightiest figures in human history.

From Jeremiah we pass to Ezekiel, a less attractive figure, but of epoch-making importance for the history of the religion of Israel. His fundamental conception is that of the greatness and glory of God, who seeks scrupulously to guard His honour from profanation. It is in the light of this conception that he judges all the past of Israel and finds it one unbroken history of unfaithfulness and rebellion. This long career of wickedness is brought to a close by the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile, by which Yahweh vindicates His



honour, and lets the long repressed flood of indignation burst loose with devastating effect. Then when the blow has actually fallen, when Jerusalem lies in ruins and Judah is in exile, the same thought of God as seeking in all His actions His own glory gives the prophet the assurance of restoration, since otherwise Yahweh will seem to the heathen to have been too weak to save His people and His city from destruction. And it is for this restored community that, in his closing chapters, he sketches the constitution, which was of immense historical importance as constituting the bridge between Deuteronomy and the Priestly Code. His great doctrine of individual responsibility sprang also from his desire to vindicate God's honour, which the Jews had impugned in charging their disasters on the sins of their fathers. Ezekiel's reply is that neither guilt nor merit can be transferred; each is responsible for his own conduct alone.

But Ezekiel's prediction of restoration brought no permanent comfort to the disheartened exiles. For them the Second Isaiah (Isaiah xl.-lv.) uttered his great message of consolation. To a people crushed by the splendour of Babylonian idolatry and despondent of deliverance, he pro-

claims the unconquerable greatness of Israel's God and the nothingness of the idols. He foretells in rapturous language the restoration of Israel now that she has received at the Lord's hand double for all her sins. For Israel has a great mission in which her sufferings have their place. This mission is to proclaim to the heathen the knowledge of the true God and to endure vicarious suffering for its sin. Thus the author creates the great figure of the Servant of Yahweh in which he sketches an ideal for the nation which could in history be accomplished only by Jesus Christ.

The problem of Israel's suffering was otherwise handled by Habakkuk, who, while he could give no speculative answer, yet was assured that the oppressor would be overthrown and that the righteous would live by his fidelity to God. Of the post-exilic period I need not speak in detail except to notice how prophecy began to develop towards apocalyptic, a movement which we can already trace in Zephaniah and Ezekiel, but still more in Zechariah, in Joel, and in Isaiah xxiv.-xxvii. Much stress should be laid on the Book of Jonah, the greatness of which is commonly entirely missed. The book bids the hard and exclusive

Jewish people accept the mission to which the Second Isaiah had summoned them and proclaim to the heathen the knowledge of the true God. Again and again the author emphasizes the willingness of the Gentiles to welcome the truth ; again and again he paints the reluctance of Israel to accept its mission and its disappointment that its anticipations of the destruction of the heathen are falsified. This book with its wonderful presentation of the universal grace of God forms a fitting climax to the great monuments of Hebrew prophecy.

The meaning of all this great development, only in more detail than I have been able to indicate, should be made clear to our elder scholars. It cannot possibly be done, as I have said, on the present system. It is necessary to substitute the connected exposition of a prophet for the exposition of fragments. At the same time, selected portions ought to be read in connection with the exposition of certain ideas. They would be read not with a view to minute explanation, but, first, because it is undesirable to summarise an author and leave the pupil without any impression of the original texts, and, secondly, because the reading of the text

gives definiteness to the summary, and its own significance is best understood when it is placed in its historical context. And what is true of the prophets is true also of some other books. Job, for example, does not lend itself to Sunday School teaching very well. But the pupil should gain some conception of its problem, of the discussion that it receives in the book, of the way in which Job's attitude towards God was transformed by the pressure of it, of the significance to be attached to the speech of Yahweh and the fact that it contains no solution of the problem, and of the peace brought to Job by the vision of God in spite of his failure to understand why he had suffered.

Then, in the New Testament, what is to be made of the Epistles? These, again, are much too difficult to be brought into any scheme constructed on present lines. Yet our elder scholars ought to have some conception of Paulinism, alike for its own value and its immense historical importance. It is best to connect this closely with the Apostle's own religious experience. It is not, of course, the case that experience created the whole of his theology, but it is the source of his most characteristic teaching.

Rudely wakened from his happy life of innocence, as the budding soul within him grew to recognise its relation to a moral order and its own antagonism to it, he entered on the tragic period of inward conflict, in which the flesh and the mind battled for the mastery. As experience deepened he realised how hopeless was the struggle to attain conformity with the Law of God. While his higher nature had recognised the excellences of the moral law and strove desperately for harmony with it, the flesh mocked all the mind's vain movements for emancipation from its dominion. Probing himself for the reason, he saw that sin had taken the flesh as its stronghold and from that vantage point had brought him into captivity. And its baleful character was in nothing more manifest than in this, that it had taken the Holy Law of God and made it an instrument of evil. For the Law had the power of breaking the spell which held sin coiled in an enchanted slumber in the flesh, and of stimulating the whole of his lower nature to conscious rebellion. And thus his own experience gave him his doctrine of sin, of the flesh, and of the Law. And just as the doctrine of man in his unregenerate condition



was created for him by his experience before conversion, so experience created his doctrine of salvation. It is true that the Old Testament had supplied him with a basis, and that he had never escaped from the influence of the Judaism in which he had been trained. It is true especially that the teaching of Jesus Himself had profoundly influenced him. For Paul was a suspected person in the Christian Church, and much of his teaching was cordially disliked by many of his fellow Christians. He cannot therefore have left himself open to the serious charge that his teaching fundamentally diverged from the teaching of Jesus.

He had never known Jesus and therefore could not read into the risen and exalted Christ all the sacred memories of intercourse with Him during His earthly career. Blinded by the blaze of supernatural glory which had struck him to the ground on the road to Damascus, he thought of Jesus as the exalted Lord, a Being covered with light as with a garment, and seated in radiant splendour at His Father's right hand. He measured the quality and range of His sacrifice and through it the passion of love that moved Him to His redeeming work by the readi-

ness with which He stooped from His glory to man's estate and the depth of infamy which He made His own in the Cross. With the thought of this stupendous surrender, which shrank from no extreme of agony, with the blissful consciousness that his own life, which had so long been rent asunder by its inward conflict, was now harmonised in perfect peace, with the ever-present memory of his career as a persecutor, he was driven on by an imperious passion of gratitude and spurred forward by a remorse and shame that would have been intolerable save for the sense that his hate of the Lord who had bought him had been begotten of ignorance and unbelief. And thus, in thinking of Jesus, he had started from the heavenly vision and set all his theology in the key of that splendour. He carried his thought of Jesus backward to His pre-existence in the form of God as God's image, in and through whom the Universe had been created, and who bore it onward to its great consummation. He carried his thought forward to the time when He should return in His glory and put all His enemies beneath His feet. What wonder, then, if, with this glorious past and this glorious future, the details of the earthly life

and teaching should fade into insignificance ? Fade, that is, with one exception. For in a sense the highest point of glory seemed to be touched by Christ when He reached the lowest depth of shame. The Cross is the centre of Paul's teaching, and he wishes to glory in it alone. Here is the supreme moment in the history of Jesus, for here the divinity which is His glory received its mightiest expression. For the supreme glory of God is not the wisdom with which He planned the marvellous universe, nor yet the power with which He continually upholds it. Power and wisdom are not, and cannot be, the divinest things in God ; these might be present in an impure and malignant being, who would be all the more awful to us for the possession of these qualities. But the supreme thing in God is the love by which He loves others better than He loves Himself, and therefore shrinks from no sacrifice that He may save them. It is not the luminous radiance in which He dwells that is His supreme glory, nor yet the glory that is declared by the wonders of the heavens, but it is that He stoops to pain and shame for the blessing of His creatures. A self-centred deity would not be for us the God whom

Jesus has taught us to love and worship. It is no wonder then that Paul, with his deep, clear insight into the heart of things, seized with unfailing instinct the Cross of Jesus as the supreme manifestation of God's glory and made it the centre of his Gospel.

And it was his own experience of its power that led him to throw such stress upon it. The central element in his consciousness of redemption, which, indeed, included everything else, was his immediate knowledge that he was one with Christ. In this, the deepest secret of the Christian consciousness, a secret so deep that only the keenest spiritual insight could have discovered it, he had the solution of his practical difficulties and the essence of his theory of salvation. Release from the tyranny of the old and the glad sense of freedom in the Spirit had been realised in his mystical union with the crucified and risen Lord, a union achieved by the faith that staked the soul's all upon Him. The supreme spiritual crises through which Jesus had passed were repeated in Paul. To the spiritual cross the flesh had been nailed and on it had been done to death. And thus the spirit, emancipated from the flesh, had shared the resurrection of Jesus

and entered on the new life of holiness to God. The old life, with its guilt and shame, was now for God as if it had never been. He stood before God in Christ, so indissolubly one with Him that God could pass no other judgment on Paul than the judgment He passed on Jesus; he was justified in Christ. And the problem of morality which had utterly baffled him under the Law was solved for him. On the one side, with the crucifixion of the flesh, sin's stronghold within him had been destroyed. Moreover, the Law, which was the strength of Sin, could no longer chafe him and goad him to revolt, for the liberated spirit had burst upward into that realm of freedom which is the heritage of the sons of God. And on the other side his life was controlled from the centre. No external power laid its alien constraint upon him, but all his actions were the instinctive expression of the indwelling Christ, who was the inmost kernel of his personality. Solved, too, was the problem of the future. For the life of Death's conqueror was an immortal life, and this blessed immortality must be shared by all who were inseparably united to Him.

Thus we see how the great distinctive doctrines of Paulinism were but the transcript of his own



experience. And as he read the experience of the individual in the light of his own, so also he read the experience of the race, and formulated it in his doctrine of the two Adams. Here, however, we have to recognise especially the influence of Christ's own teaching as to His Person.

Here, again, as in the case of the Prophets, much prominence should be given to the reading of passages bearing upon the questions under discussion. The teacher would start with the autobiography in Romans vii., and when he came to the conversion would lay much stress on Paul's own narrative in the first chapter of Galatians. When dealing with the extremely obscure and difficult problems touching Paul's doctrine of the flesh he would naturally select the statements actually made by the Apostle, especially those in Romans vii. and viii., or the catalogue of the works of the flesh in Galatians. But by showing how point by point Paul's doctrine was closely connected with his own spiritual history he would impart a fascinating reality to what might seem to be a series of repellent abstractions, and might also impress his pupils with a feeling for the validity and permanent value of the Pauline theology. There

is a real danger that this theology may seem a brilliant exercise of intellectual gymnastic reaching unwarrantable conclusions from unverified premises. But when we watch the man move forward to it, not merely with the cool reason of the logician, but through the bloody sweat of tragic experience into the perfect rest of one wholly at peace with God, this system of theology lays hold of us with a grip which will not let us go. Everywhere the Bible by its very form sends home to us the lesson that the revelation that it enshrines has been achieved through experience, and what experience had attained is by experience again and again being ratified.

But while I should still give Biblical teaching a very important place in the higher parts of the school, I should here introduce also definite instruction in the other departments I have named. With the knowledge of Biblical history attained in the lower school, most thorough in the case of the Gospel history, and with the unconscious assimilation of doctrine gained at the same time, a good foundation would have been laid for more systematic teaching. This might very well be grouped about a catechism. The value of a good catechism is that it briefly

sets out the subject in its proper order and relations, and furnishes the student with a set of accurate definitions. Catechisms require to be drawn up with very great care, with certain guiding principles clearly in view. They should be so planned that the development proceeds naturally and easily throughout; they ought to be short, and sternly exclude everything that is unnecessary. The answers should be complete in themselves independently of the questions, inasmuch as the definitions they contain will not otherwise be accurately remembered if the question itself is forgotten. An answer should contain no full stops, since the memory is apt to fail unless it can run on connectedly to the end without being brought up sharp by a full stop in the middle. Long answers are vicious in principle, and it is far better to split up such answers into two or three separate ones. In many respects the Free Church Catechism fulfils most of the conditions, though it is not in all respects to my own mind. I feel no scruple in recommending it in spite of my own share in it, inasmuch as the main credit for it belongs to Dr. Oswald Dykes. But while a catechism may be found useful as supplying

the skeleton, something more is required for clothing it with flesh and blood. A series of lessons dealing with the different Christian doctrines, in which it should be carefully explained what they are, would be of incalculable value. Much of the objection which is felt to certain doctrines lies not against the doctrines themselves, but against the caricatures that have been mistaken for the reality.

What is true with reference to Doctrine is true also with reference to Apologetics, to which attention should be given before a boy leaves school. It is of the utmost importance that he should not be turned defenceless on the world, and unable to give a reason for the faith that is in him. If he does not learn some of the most telling arguments against his religion when he is at school, he is likely to learn them later; and what will be his plight if he does not know how the difficulties are to be met, or if he is unable to advance any positive reason for the belief in which he has been trained? The Church ought to see that this is one of its primary duties to its own young people, and yet how rarely do we even find the consciousness that such a need exists at all.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE TEACHER AND THE CURRICULUM

THERE may be many who have followed my discussions so far with general agreement, who will say that while the things I plead for are desirable it is not possible for us to achieve them under present conditions. The crux of the matter, I shall be told, lies not so much in the curriculum as in the teacher. The teachers are generally untrained, it will be said, and often inefficient, and it is useless to supply them with an improved curriculum until they are trained to teach it properly. I may quote here from a recent volume by Professor Brumbaugh on "The Making of a Teacher." There is much that is excellent in its exposition of the psychological conditions on which successful teaching depends. He expresses the judgment that I have just imagined some of my readers as uttering. I will quote his own words. "If thoroughly equipped and trained teachers can



be secured, all other needs incident to perfect products will follow. If the vital need is provided all attendant conditions to right teaching will inevitably be secured. It seems manifestly foolish to waste time and energy upon subordinate matters when the dominant question is unsettled, and even unnoted." "Before we refine our materials of instruction we must refine our teachers. The vital need of the Sunday School to-day is not graded courses of study, but teacher-training. Seek first to secure efficient teachers, and the graded course of study will in due time be added." "I must impress the fact that it is the power of the teacher more than the grading of the material that makes success possible in the training of a human soul. Give the children teachers first. Graded materials of instruction will inevitably follow in due time."

I cannot, of course, pit my authority against his in his own particular sphere, but I have no hesitation in describing the advice I have just quoted as most mischievous. I do not doubt that teachers need training, but the argument that we must wait until we have trained teachers before we revise our course of instruction fills

me with amazement. Both teacher and system are at fault. But in the first place it is better that a bad teacher should have a good curriculum than that he should have a bad one, inasmuch as the children will at any rate be getting better material ; and, secondly, the very charge against the teacher should lead us to construct the system in such a way that his inefficiency should be made as harmless as possible. Let us do all in our power to correct the inefficiency of the teacher, but do not let us forget that for a very long time to come this state of things will continue—we may hope with diminishing intensity. The need for a thorough change in the curriculum is not the less but the more urgent on that account. It should be by no means impossible to develop a system under which the class should be safeguarded much more than at present from the teacher's incompetence.

The author argues that fine tools are for skilled hands ; the principle is true, but it seems to have little bearing upon this question. Are sharp tools for strong hands only ? If the arm is weak ought the axe to be blunt to match it ? I do not understand why a course of lessons suited to junior stages should not be quite as

easy to teach to the little children as the present course. The principle of graded lessons does not involve a refinement in the tools to be placed in the hands of the teacher, but some adaptation of the tools to the materials with which the teachers have to work. A reflection on this obvious fact might have shown the author the fallacy of his position. It is true that some things I want, especially in the advanced classes, demand a fuller knowledge than the average teacher can be said to possess. On the other hand, the desire for more text to be read in class and less time to be devoted to exposition, the concentration of attention on familiarity with the subject matter itself rather than moralisings upon it, would, if carried out, considerably reduce the mischief resulting from the incapacity of the teacher. Besides, the demand for graded courses of instruction does not go to the root of the matter. It is very important, but anyone who has followed my criticism of the present system will see that there are defects in it even more grave perhaps than the absence of gradation. If I urge that the definite point of attack for Sunday School reform is the curriculum itself, it is not because I have forgotten

the importance of the teacher. He counts enormously in Sunday School work, not only in the matter of efficiency, but of character. But a bad curriculum remains bad even when the teacher's efficiency is at its highest point, and when he exerts the healthiest moral and religious influence. I may point out to some of my critics who have urged that the teacher's influence is the vital thing in Sunday School work that, even if this were true, it is altogether irrelevant to the subject. Whatever be the curriculum the character of the teacher remains a constant and not a shifting factor. And I must urge further with all my power that it is also a vital matter to see that the actual instruction given should be of the best.

Is it true, then, that our teachers are incompetent? It is naturally very difficult for anyone to answer such a question. Even where the facts that come under one's own observation, or of which one hears from those familiar with Sunday School work, seem to justify an answer, we must never forget how very limited after all are our opportunities of forming a judgment. But so far as one may offer with all diffidence an impression, I should sum up the position as

follows. Probably the number of professionally trained teachers constitutes a rather small proportion of the total number. Of those that remain there are many who give themselves zealously to the task of self-equipment, and take with due seriousness the responsible position in which they are placed. But I fear it is true that it is those who most need training who are least willing to accept it, or are ready to give themselves the labour needed to attain it. There has been too much of the feeling that anyone is competent for Sunday School work, and this has acted disastrously in more ways than one. It has reduced the ideal of Sunday School teaching to a low level, and it has kept out of the schools many of those who would be best qualified to serve the Church in them. It is not to be wondered at if parents often shrink from entrusting the souls of their children to the tender mercies of theological amateurs. Moreover, children who are accustomed to be taught in the day school by trained teachers are very sensible of the difference when they come into the hands of those whose well-meaning devotion is their only qualification for the work. All these difficulties exist on the present system,



and with the reform I suggest they would certainly not be diminished. And over and above there would come the difficulty that, while on the present system the teacher can live from hand to mouth by the help of the ready-made lessons, he would find it certainly less easy to do this where a really systematic kind of teaching was in practice. On the other hand, if some such scheme came into operation, the better equipped members of our Churches might be willing to take their share. To gain the amount of knowledge required would not, after all, be a very serious burden for any fairly educated, intelligent person.

The need for training teachers is urgent. In the classes this can be carried on by setting the senior scholars to work under the guidance of professionally trained teachers. This would bind them to the school by a tie of living interest, and when vacancies occurred they could be filled up by drafting trained teachers into them. On what lines such classes should be conducted I have no right to say, but those who approach the Sunday School problem from the side of educational method are quite ready to lead us in this matter.

Another point of importance is the training of theological students, so that when they become ministers they may be prepared to guide the schools that come under their care along right lines. It is important to draw closer the relations between the Theological Colleges and the Sunday Schools. When the fact has been grasped by the Church that the Sunday School demands from the minister his most assiduous attention and his most watchful care, it will be seen that training in the principles of teaching should constitute an important part of the College curriculum. A development which would promise much good for the future would be that Churches should definitely appoint ministers whose main care should be to look after the Sunday Schools. Whether we should supplement our present system of voluntary service by the introduction into our schools of trained teachers, who are paid a salary, is a question on which I have no competence to pronounce.

Another matter to which a few words must be devoted is the question of teachers' preparation classes. So far as these have come under my notice they are generally conducted on wrong principles. What is wanted is not that the

teacher should be crammed for the next Sunday's lesson ; what he needs is a basis of general Biblical and theological knowledge. My point may be illustrated by what is said with reference to technical education. It has been found in many instances that a pupil has not been able to gain great advantage from technical teaching because he has lacked the basis of a sound and accurate elementary education. Now, this is largely true of the teacher's treatment of his lesson, he has not sufficient Biblical knowledge to make the best use of the special fragment with which he may happen to be dealing. The system of lectures by experts, where these can be arranged, would, if advantage were taken of them by the teachers, do much to raise the quality of Sunday School instruction.\*

Another important thing is the provision of good libraries. For the younger children, all I would urge at present would be that the books should be carefully chosen, with stern exclusion of the goody-goody type, and all books constructed on the principle that good little boys go to heaven at the age of twelve, and that a bad boy's career begins with breaking the Sabbath

\* Such courses of lectures are being given this Session at Lancashire Independent College.

and ends with breaking his neck. It is an insult to any intelligent child to offer him such trashy unreality as this. Good literature, well printed, strongly and attractively bound, not the wreckage of spring cleans and removals, nor books bought like the illiterate millionaire's at so much per yard. This may suffice for the children's library. But on the teacher's library it is worth while to spend generously, always provided that the teachers are willing to use the books. Here, again, careful selection is imperative. This is pre-eminently the case where the best should be bought, so that the teacher may have the advantage of the freshest work by the ablest writers. It is pathetic to think of teachers who fancy themselves equipped for their work in the matter of books with Adam Clarke or Barnes, or some obsolete dictionary of the Bible. Even if some little extravagance here and there on the part of the Church has to be given up, where it has the means to provide good libraries for teachers and children, it is its obvious duty to do it.

I do not expect, indeed, to see reform coming very quickly; the Sunday School world moves slowly and is deeply pledged to the present

state of things. As I have said already, the least progressive control the pace far too much. Yet it is a matter for much thankfulness and a hopeful sign that the authorities have at last recognised the necessity of providing separate lessons for junior classes. It is true that this meets only one of the objections I have urged against the present system, and perhaps not the most serious. Nor does the actual course adopted seem to me to be the best. Nevertheless, the important principle that there should be an adaptation in the lessons to the ages of the scholars has at last received recognition. But when I think how much the religion of the next generation depends on the training of our children in this, I am constrained to hope that the needed reforms will not be altogether too long in coming. I imagine that in all the Churches the losses are for the most part made good from the Sunday Schools. Even from them we have a tremendous leakage, and on the world outside the influence of the Churches is far less than one would wish. It is a good thing to draft into the Church as many of our scholars as possible, though we ought to be making much more impression than we do on the growing multitudes



who are steadily being alienated from religion. We have, then, in our own hands, in a plastic form, the material of the Church that is to be, easily moulded and quick to take indelible impressions. Are we content that the training should be perfunctory, inefficient and altogether inadequate, or is the Church prepared to realise, what is indeed a fact, that the Sunday School is its most important institution, calling for enthusiastic service from the best equipped of its members, and for a training planned on the broadest lines and carefully thought-out in all its parts ?

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## Index of Titles

	PAGE		PAGE
Abbey Mill, The . . . . .	17	Christian Life, The . . . . .	20, 26
Adrift on the Black Wild Tide . . . . .	16	Christian World Pulpit, The . . . . .	6
America in the East . . . . .	4	Christianity and Social Prob- lems . . . . .	6
Ancient Musical Instruments . . . . .	21	Christianity in Common Speech . . . . .	26
Angels of God, The . . . . .	19	Chrystabel . . . . .	10, 17
Animal Fun . . . . .	22	Church and the Kingdom, The . . . . .	21
Animal Gambols . . . . .	22	Church, Ministry and Sacra- ments in the New Testa- ment . . . . .	5
Apocalyptical Writers, The Messages of the . . . . .	11	Cinderella . . . . .	3, 17
Apostles, The Messages of the . . . . .	11	Comforts of God, The . . . . .	21
Art of Living Alone, The . . . . .	20	Common Life, The . . . . .	8
Atonement in Modern Thought, The . . . . .	7	Common-sense Christianity . . . . .	18
Aunt Agatha Ann . . . . .	25	Conquered World, The . . . . .	19, 26
Awe of the New Century, The . . . . .	25	Courage of the Coward, The . . . . .	8
Baptist Handbook, The . . . . .	14	Crucible of Experience, The . . . . .	18
Barbone Parliament, The . . . . .	5	Daughter of Fife, A . . . . .	10, 17
Barrow, Henry, Separatist . . . . .	2	Debt of the Damerals, The . . . . .	17
Beads of Tasmar, The . . . . .	10	Divine Satisfaction, The . . . . .	25
Between Two Loves . . . . .	10	Do We Need a New Theology ? . . . . .	22
Bible Definition of Religion, The . . . . .	25	Dutch in the Medway, The . . . . .	10
Bible Story, The : Retold for Young People . . . . .	15	Early Pupils of the Spirit . . . . .	16
Bishop and the Caterpillar, The . . . . .	25	Earlier Prophets, The Messages of the . . . . .	11
Black Familiars, The . . . . .	4, 17	Earliest Christian Hymn, The . . . . .	15
Border Shepherdess, A . . . . .	10	Economics of Jesus, The . . . . .	18
Bow of Orange Ribbon, The . . . . .	10, 17	Emilia's Inheritance . . . . .	17
Britain's Hope . . . . .	19	England's Danger . . . . .	26
Brudenells of Brude, The . . . . .	17	Episcopacy . . . . .	11
Burning Questions . . . . .	9, 19	Epistle to the Galatians, The . . . . .	15
Canonbury Holt . . . . .	17	Esther Wynne . . . . .	10, 17
Cartoons of St. Mark . . . . .	5	Eternal Religion, The . . . . .	8
Challenge, The . . . . .	13	Ezekiel, The Book of . . . . .	2
Changing Creeds and Social Struggles . . . . .	9	Faith and Verification . . . . .	5
Character through Inspiration . . . . .	20	Faith the Beginning. Self-Sur- render the Fulfilment, of the Spiritual Life . . . . .	20, 26
Children's Pace, The . . . . .	21	Family Prayers for Morning Use . . . . .	9
Christ of the Children, The . . . . .	13	Father Fabian . . . . .	17
Christ of the Heart, The . . . . .	5	Feet of Clay . . . . .	10
Christ that is To Be, The . . . . .	9	Fireside Fairy Tales . . . . .	22
Christ, The Private Relation- ships of . . . . .	5	First Christians, The . . . . .	8
Christ Within, The . . . . .	19	Flower-o'-the-Corn . . . . .	3, 17
Christ's Pathway to the Cross . . . . .	18	Forgotten Sheaf, The . . . . .	19
Christian Baptism . . . . .	18		

	PAGE
Fortune's Favourite . . .	17
Fortunes of Cyril Denham, The . . .	17
Friars Lantern . . .	7
Friend Olivia . . .	4
Gain or Loss ? . . .	22
Gamble with Life, A . . .	9
Garcia, G. H. R. . . .	9
Garrisoned Soul, The . . .	22
Gloria Patri : Talks about the Trinity . . .	9
Glorious Company of the Apostles, The . . .	16
God's Greater Britain . . .	9
Golden Truths for Young Folk . . .	23
Gospel of Grace, The . . .	7
Grey and Gold . . .	10, 17
Grey House at Endlestone . . .	17
Growing Revelation, The . . .	6
Haromi : A New Zealand Story . . .	4
Harvest Gleanings . . .	14
Health and Home Nursing . . .	23
Health in the Home Life . . .	12
Heartsease in the Family . . .	12
Heirs of Errington, The . . .	17
Helen Bury . . .	12
Helps to Health and Beauty . . .	24
Higher on the Hill . . .	7
His Next of Kin . . .	10, 17
His Rustic Wife . . .	9
History of the United States, A . . .	2
Holy Christian Empire . . .	27
Holy Spirit, The . . .	18
Household of McNeil, The . . .	10
House of Bondage, The . . .	17
How to Become Like Christ . . .	20
How to Read the Bible . . .	23
Husbands and Wives . . .	17
Ideals for Girls . . .	16
Immanence of Christ in Modern Life, The . . .	12
Incarnation of the Lord, The . . .	6
Industrial Explorings in and around London . . .	9
Infoldings and Unfoldings of the Divine Genius . . .	20
Inspiration in Common Life . . .	18
Institutional Church, The . . .	26
Inward Light, The . . .	7
Israel's Law Givers, The Messages of . . .	11
Jan Vedder's Wife . . .	17
Jealousy of God, The . . .	20
Jesus and His Teaching . . .	7

	PAGE
Jesus, The Messages of, Accord- ing to the Synoptists . . .	11
Joan Carisbroke . . .	10, 17
Job and His Comforters . . .	14
Joshua, The Book of . . .	3
Judges, The Book of . . .	3
Kid McGhie . . .	3
Kingdom of the Lord Jesus, The . . .	20, 26
Kit Kennedy : Country Boy 3, . . .	17
Lady Clarissa . . .	17
Last of the MacAllisters, The . . .	10
Later Prophets, The Messages of the . . .	11
Leaves for Quiet Hours . . .	13
Let us Pray . . .	21
Letters of Christ, The . . .	18
Liberty and Religion . . .	13
Life and Letters of Alexander Mackennal, The . . .	6
Louis Wain's Animal Show . . .	23
Loves of Miss Anne, The . . .	3, 17
Lynch, Rev. T. T. : A Memoir . . .	4
Making of an Apostle, The . . .	19
Manual for Free Church Minis- ters, A . . .	23
Martineau's Study of Religion . . .	20, 26
Maud Bolingbroke . . .	12
Max Hereford's Dream . . .	26
Messages of the Bible, The . . .	11
Method of Prayer, A . . .	12
Millicent Kendrick . . .	10, 17
Miss Devereux, Spinster . . .	17
Model Prayer, The . . .	16
More Tasty Dishes . . .	24
Morning and Evening Cries . . .	14
Morning Mist, A . . .	17
Morning, Noon, and Night . . .	24
Mornington Lecture, The . . .	5
Mr. Montmorency's Money . . .	10, 17
My Baptism . . .	16
My Neighbour and God . . .	13
New Evangel, The . . .	12
New Mrs. Lascelles, The . . .	17
New Points to Old Texts . . .	10
New Testament in Modern Speech, The . . .	14
Nineteen Hundred ? . . .	10
Nobly Born . . .	10, 17
Nonconformist Church Build- ings . . .	16

	PAGE		PAGE
Old Pictures in Modern Frames	19	Resultant Greek Testament,	
Oliver Cromwell . . . .	24	The . . . . .	14
Oliver Westwood . . . .	17	Rights of Man, The . . . .	4
On Seeing Angels . . . .	16	Rise of Philip Barrett, The	4, 15
Ordeal of Faith, The . . .	15	Robert Wreford's Daughter .	10
Our City of God . . . . .	4	Rogers, J. Guinness . . . .	2
Our Girls' Cookery . . . .	25	Rome from the Inside . . . .	24
Ourselves and the Universe .	8	Rosebud Annual, The . . . .	7, 12
Outline Text Lessons for		Rose of a Hundred Leaves, A .	4
Junior Classes . . . . .	23	Ruling Ideas of the Present Age	6
Overdale . . . . .	10, 17		
Passion for Souls, The . . .	18	School Hymns . . . . .	12, 27
Paul and Christina . . . .	10	School of Life, The . . . . .	12
Paul, The Messages of . . .	11	Sceptre Without a Sword, The	25
Paxton Hood: Poet and		Scourge of God, The . . . . .	17
Preacher . . . . .	9	Seven Puzzling Bible Books	5, 19
Personality of Jesus, The . .	11	Ship of the Soul, The . . . .	20, 26
Pilot, The . . . . .	13	Ship's Engines, The . . . . .	26
Poems. By Mme. Guyon . . .	11	She Loved a Sailor . . . . .	10
Polychrome Bible, The . . .	2, 3	Short Devotional Services . .	21
Popular Argument for the		Simple Cookery . . . . .	16
Unity of Isaiah, A . . .	15	Simple Things of the Christian	
Popular History of the Free		Life . . . . .	18
Churches, A . . . . .	4, 14	Singlehurst Manor . . . . .	10
Practical Lay Preaching and		Sissie . . . . .	10, 17
Speaking to Men . . . .	13	Sister to Esau, A . . . . .	10, 17
Practical Points in Popular		Small Books on Great Subjects	
Proverbs . . . . .	15	. . . . .	19, 20
Prayer . . . . .	18	Social Salvation . . . . .	6
Preaching to the Times . . .	10	Social Worship an Everlasting	
Price of Priestcraft, The . . .	22	Necessity . . . . .	19, 26
Pride of the Family, The . .	17	Squire of Sandal Side, The	10, 17
Principles and Practices of the		St. Beetha's . . . . .	10, 17
Baptists . . . . .	14	Storehouse for Preachers and	
Problems of Living . . . . .	8	Teachers . . . . .	21
Prophetical and Priestly His-		Story of the English Baptists,	
torians, The Messages of .	11	The . . . . .	7
Psalms The Messages of the	11	Story of Penelope, The . . .	17
		Studies of the Soul . . . . .	8
Quickening of Caliban, The .	10	Sunday Afternoon Song Book	
Quiet Hints to Growing		. . . . .	26, 27
Preachers . . . . .	11	Sunday Morning Talks with	
		Boys and Girls . . . . .	14
Race and Religion . . . . .	21	Sunny Memories of Australasia	18
Reasonable View of Life, A .	18	Supreme Argument for Chris-	
Reasons Why for Congrega-		tianity, The . . . . .	20
tionalists . . . . .	18		
Reasons Why for Free Church-		Tale of a Telephone, A . . . .	25
men . . . . .	22	Talks to Little Folks . . . .	24
Reconsiderations and Rein-		Taste of Death and the Life of	
forcements . . . . .	20	Grace, The . . . . .	19, 26
Reform in Sunday School		Tasty Dishes . . . . .	24
Teaching . . . . .	19	Ten Commandments, The . . .	15
Religion and Experience . . .	4	Theology and Truth . . . . .	5
Religion of Jesus, The . . .	16	Theophilus Trinal, Memorials of	5
Religion that will Wear, A .	23	Thornycroft Hall . . . . .	17, 27
		Thoughts for Life's Journey .	7

	PAGE		PAGE
Through Science to Faith . . .	4	Wanderer, The . . . . .	9
Tommy, and Other Poems . . .	22	Warleigh's Trust . . . . .	17
Tools and the Man . . . . .	6	Way of Life, The . . . . .	20
Town Romance, A; or, On		Wayside Angels . . . . .	24
London Stones . . . . .	17	What Shall this Child Be ? .	15
Trial and Triumph . . . . .	19	Who Wrote the Bible ? . . .	18
Types of Christian Life . . .	20	Why We Believe . . . . .	13
Undertones of the Nineteenth		Wideness of God's Mercy, The	18
Century . . . . .	14	Wife as Lover and Friend, The	16
Unique Class Chart and		William Jeffrey . . . . .	18
Register . . . . .	27	Woman's Patience, A . . . .	17
Unknown to Herself . . . . .	17	Women and their Saviour . .	22
Value of the Apocrypha, The .	18	Women and their Work . . .	18
Vida; or, The Iron King's		Words by the Wayside . . .	20
Daughter . . . . .	3	Working Woman's Life, A . .	7
Violet Vaughan . . . . .	10, 17	Woven of Love and Glory . .	10
Voice from China, A . . . .	8	Young Man's Religion, A . .	14

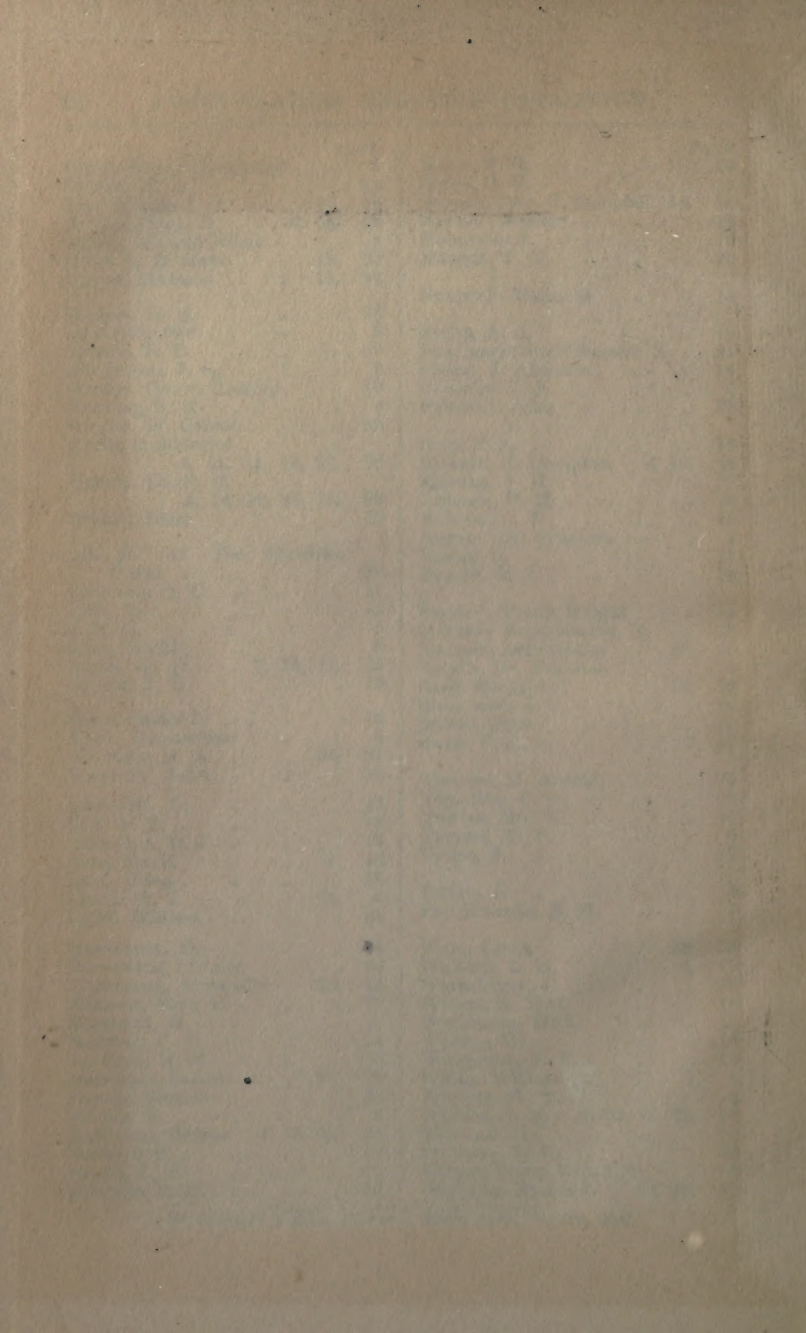
## Index of Authors

Abbot, C. L. . . . .	9	Campbell, Rev. R. J. . . . .	10
Abbott, Lyman . . . . .	4	Carile, Rev. J. C. . . . .	7, 24
Adeney, W. F. . . . .	23	Clifford, Dr. . . . .	19, 26
Aitchison, George . . . . .	21	Coulton, G. G. . . . .	7
Aked, C. F. . . . .	8	Crockett, S. R. . . . .	3, 17
Andom, R. . . . .	9	Cubitt, James . . . . .	16
Andrews, C. C. . . . .	17	Cuff, W. . . . .	18
Antram, C. E. P. . . . .	22	Davidson, Gladys . . . . .	23
Armstrong, Richard A. . . .	20, 26	Dods, Marcus . . . . .	20
Bainton, George . . . . .	16	Ellis, J. . . . .	21, 23
Barr, Amelia E. . . . .	4, 10, 17	Evans, H. . . . .	22
Barrett, G. S. . . . .	15	Farningham, Marianne . . .	7, 10, 14, 18, 22
Barrows, C. H. . . . .	11	Finlayson, T. Campbell . . .	26
Bennett, Rev. W. H. . . . .	3, 15	Fiske, J. . . . .	2
Benvie, Andrew . . . . .	7	Forsyth, Rev. Principal . . .	19, 26, 27
Blake, J. M. . . . .	18	Fraser, J. . . . .	11
Bloundelle-Burton, J. . . .	17	Funcke, O. . . . .	12
Bradford, Amory H. . . . .	6, 7, 20	Gibbon, J. Morgan . . . . .	15
Brierley, H. E. . . . .	22	Giberne, Agnes . . . . .	17
Brierley, J. . . . .	4, 8, 12	Gladden, Washington . . . .	5, 6, 7, 9, 17, 18, 19, 21
Brock, W. . . . .	15		
Brooke, Stopford A. . . . .	20, 26		
Brown, C. . . . .	18		
Burford, W. K. . . . .	24		



	PAGE		PAGE
Glass, Henry Alexander . . . . .	5	Meyer, F. B. . . . .	18
Glover, R. . . . .	21	Moore, G. F. . . . .	3
Greenhough, J. G. . . . .	14, 19	Morgan, Rev. G. Campbell . . . . .	15, 18
Griffith-Jones, E. . . . .	5, 18, 20	Morten, Honnor . . . . .	12
Griffis, William Elliot . . . . .	4	Mountain, J. . . . .	16
Gunn, E. H. Mayo . . . . .	12, 27	Munger, T. T. . . . .	20
Guyon, Madame . . . . .	11, 12		
Haweis, H. R. . . . .	16	Notewell, Nicholas . . . . .	16
Haycraft, Mrs. . . . .	9	Peake, A. S. . . . .	19
Heddle, E. F. . . . .	17	Pharmaceutical Chemist, A . . . . .	24
Henderson, J. G. . . . .	9	Pieton, J. Allanson . . . . .	16
Henson, Canon Hensley . . . . .	10	Powieke, F. J. . . . .	2
Hocking, S. K. . . . .	0	Pulsford, John . . . . .	20
Holder, W. Garrett . . . . .	20		
Horne, C. Silvester . . . . .		Rees, F. A. . . . .	15
4, 14, 15, 18, 21, 26	26	Rickett, J. Compton . . . . .	9, 10, 26
Horton, Dr. R. F. . . . .		Ridette, J. H. . . . .	27
5, 18, 19, 24, 25, 26	26	Robarts, F. H. . . . .	14
Hunter, John . . . . .	19	Roberts, J. E. . . . .	18
"J. B." of <i>The Christian</i>		Rogers, Dr. Guinness . . . . .	2
<i>World</i> . . . . .	24	Rudge, C. . . . .	18
Jefferson, C. E. . . . .	11	Russell, F. A. . . . .	18
Jeffs, H. . . . .	13		
J. M. G. . . . .	9	Sanders, Frank Knight . . . . .	11
John, Griffith . . . . .	8	Scottish Presbyterian, A . . . . .	23
Jones, J. D. . . . .	7, 16, 18, 22	Sinclair, Archdeacon . . . . .	20, 26
Jowett, J. H. . . . .	18	Smyth, Dr. Newman . . . . .	4
Kane, James J. . . . .	16	Snell, Bernard J. . . . .	18, 22
Kaye, Bannerman . . . . .	4	Stevenson, J. G. . . . .	13
Kennedy, H. A. . . . .	26, 27	Sutter, Julie . . . . .	19
Kennedy, John . . . . .	15	Swan, F. R. . . . .	12
Lansfeldt, L. . . . .	17		
Lee, W. T. . . . .	13	Thomas, H. Arnold . . . . .	20
Llewellyn, D. J. . . . .	18	Toy, Rev. C. H. . . . .	2
Lyall, David . . . . .	4, 15	Trotter, Mrs. E. . . . .	14
Lyall, Edna . . . . .	26	Tymms, T. V. . . . .	5
Lynch, T. T. . . . .	4, 5	Tytler, S. . . . .	17
Lynd, William . . . . .	21		
Macfadyen, D. . . . .	0	Veitch, R. . . . .	8
Macfarlane, Charles . . . . .	10	Von Schrenk, E. H. . . . .	7
Mackennal, Alexander . . . . .	20, 26		
Manners, Mary E. . . . .	25	Wain, Louis . . . . .	22, 23
Marchant, B. . . . .	17	Walford, L. B. . . . .	4, 17
Marshall, J. T. . . . .	14	Warschauer, J. . . . .	12
Marshall, N. H. . . . .	5	Waters, N. McG. . . . .	14
Martineau, James . . . . .	20, 26	Watkinson, W. L. . . . .	18
Mather, Lessels . . . . .	23	Watson, W. . . . .	18
Mather, Z. . . . .	5	Weymouth, R. F. . . . .	14
Matheson, George . . . . .	7, 13, 20, 25	White, William . . . . .	4
Maver, J. S. . . . .	21	Whitley, W. T. . . . .	5
Meade, L. T. . . . .	17	Whiton, J. M. . . . .	9, 10, 16, 20, 25
Metcalfe, R. D. . . . .	26	Williams, C. . . . .	14
		Williams, T. R. . . . .	19
		Wilson, Philip Whitwell . . . . .	13
		Worboise, Emma J. . . . .	10, 17, 27





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